

A
CRITICAL ANALYSIS
AND
R E V I E W,
OF ALL
MR. VOLTAIRE'S WORKS;
WITH
OCCASIONAL DISQUISITIONS
ON
E P I C P O E T R Y,
THE
DRAMA, ROMANCE, &c.
BY MR. LINGUET.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH
BY JAMES BOARDMAN.

L O N D O N:
PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, NO. 72, ST. PAUL'S
CHURCH-YARD. 1790.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

AND

R. E. I. W.

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MR. VOLTAIRE'S WORKS

45

OCCASIONAL DISCUSSIONS

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THE HISTORY OF



DRAMATIC

BY MR. LINGUET

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY JAMES BORDMAN

LONDON

PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, NO. 7, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD 1790

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

THE republic of letters was in May, 1778, deprived of that celebrated man, whose whole life was devoted to its service. Though he died at a very advanced age, his death might appear premature; for by a fate as singular and as extraordinary as were his talents, when upwards of eighty years old, he felt none of the infirmities incident to age. His mind and his body were alike free from debility.

An indiscreet friendship, or interested motives disguised under that name, forced him into imprudencies which accelerated his death. After a period of twenty-five years, spent in the most peaceful retreat, in the most regular habits of living, in as profound a calm as a constitution so replete with fire was capable of enjoying, he was suddenly transported to the centre of dissipation. —There, his mind was thrown into an agitation no less violent than his person. The public enthusiasm, heightened by secret anecdotes, and

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concealed

concealed artifices, overwhelmed him with honours too weighty for his age: his health, which labor and solitude could not impair, sunk under the lassitude and intoxication of a triumph renewed every day, and at every moment. By a misfortune, which it is not usual to hear old men complain of, it was in reality excess of pleasure that led him to the grave. Thus from beginning to the end, in every thing, and at all times, he was an extraordinary man.

It is my intention to speak here of his works only. Of what is merely personal, or relates but to his private life, I shall say nothing. Let us not furnish matter to that treacherous curiosity which seeks for anecdotes of an illustrious man, with a view rather to derive consolation under his superiority, than to add to his fame. The life of a sedentary writer, as Mr. Voltaire himself has very well observed, is best found in his own works. It is this part of his life only in which the liberal contemporary, or posterity, can be truly interested. It is from thence only that those who have not been personally acquainted with him can form a certain judgment of his character.

Mr. Voltaire appears to have possessed extreme sensibility. His impetuous imagination was strongly affected at injustice and vice: this natural disposition may have sometimes rendered him

him imprudent, and even in his turn unjust.— During his residence at Cirey, the Marchioness du Chatelet used on post-days to send a messenger before-hand to bring the letters to the castle; and then shutting herself up with another friend, they opened all Mr. Voltaire's letters; suffering none to reach him, but those in which nothing appeared capable of giving him uneasiness.

Perhaps we ought rather to pity; than blame, the man whose irritability of temper rendered this office of compassionate friendship necessary to his repose.—This organization is allied to genius; but it may hurry it into steps which will in time furnish arms to hatred; to estimate it at the present day according to its just value, materials would be wanting, which it is now impossible to collect; and were it in our power to procure them, of what use would they be?

It must be confessed that Mr. Voltaire has run into an extreme directly opposite: a merciless satyr, when his anger was excited, he has too often descended even to adulation, when he thought it might prove advantageous. His flattering hyperboles have included every rank of society: he has decreed titles of immortality to every class, from the throne to the lowest species of literature. Whether an interested policy taught

him to endeavour at disarming, by insincere panegyric, those dangerous despots, whom the freedom of his other writings might have alarmed; or whether an insatiable vanity would not suffer him to omit any means of encreasing the number of his admirers, he has left behind him but too many monuments of the facility with which he could lavish his praises. He wished not to want a single voice; and without scruple, condescended to flatter men who could not be flattered but by him alone, that he himself might appear an object of universal applause.

Whatever might be his character in this respect, and perhaps in some others, I see no necessity for deep investigation. Mr. Voltaire had faults, for he was a man; let us leave them in oblivion, with those of so many millions who possessed still greater and more pernicious errors, but the memory of which is notwithstanding blotted out for ever. Let us reject those private and suspicious anecdotes, which can tend only to tarnish the honor of literature, without possessing even the painful merit of certainty: in the present impossibility of appreciating their value, as to what concerns his principles, it were better to attribute to him virtues than vices. Let us rest satisfied in examining his works, since, as I have
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before observed,—it is from those only we can judge with any precision.

What immediately strikes, in the immense collection, is their number and variety: two Epic Poems; twenty-four Tragedies; twelve Comedies, at least; Operas; Moral Essays, in verse; Odes; and Epistles on all sorts of subjects; Tales; an incredible number of little convivial pieces, such as of themselves have established the reputation of Voiture, Chapelle, and Chaulieux; Histories, which had alone been sufficient to occupy the life, and establish the reputation of any other literary character; an Abridgement of the Theory of Sir Isaac Newton, on Natural Philosophy and Astronomy, too much condemned perhaps by the prejudice of those times, because it came from a poet's pen, and useless in the present, because the subject has been more fully investigated by others; but which, notwithstanding, had the merit of being the first work in which that subject was treated of in France*:

* This Theory, at bottom, is not more solid than that of Descartes, but this is not the standard by which the work of Mr. Voltaire is to be estimated: what has been capable of producing in men of science a conviction, or an enthusiasm, extending even to fanaticism, may be supposed, with stronger reason, to have cast an illusion before a writer who was principally engaged in letters and arts.

Romances, in which gaiety, philosophy, refined criticism, and elegance of style, supply the place of imagination, which till then had engrossed that department of literature; Dissertations without number on various points of History, the Belles Lettres, the Sciences, Philosophy, and even Jurisprudence, wherein, without the confusion, the heaviness, and obscurity of legal erudition, universal knowledge and an ardent desire of contributing to the happiness of mankind, are constantly discoverable; this passion unhappily extended to indiscretion on a delicate subject, on which silence is better than discussion; a Commentary, full of taste and impartiality, on the first and most prolific of Tragic Poets: and finally, an Epistolary Correspondence, more extensive, perhaps, than any man, of any nation, or of any country, has been found capable of maintaining: a correspondence of which, if we may form an opinion from what has already transpired of it, ever ingenious, ever agreeable, and almost always on his part instructive:—this may serve to give some idea of the literary labors of Mr. Voltaire.

When we reflect moreover that he travelled a great deal in his youth: that he spent thirty years in the dissipation of courts, and in the most brilliant circles; that he understood Italian,

Spanish,

Spanish, and English; that he had read, as it appears, attentively, in the originals the best authors in each of these languages; and that in the midst of these interruptions and occupations he was by no means indifferent to his own affairs, which were arranged and kept in an order and exactness equal to his personal vigilance and regularity; that he inspected his bills, and balanced his accounts, with as much punctuality as a man who had no other business; our astonishment at such a prodigious fertility of talents must without doubt be increased. But I ought here to make two observations, which will partly serve to explain this enigma.

First, the youth of almost all our celebrated authors has been usually spent either in painful struggles, or in those embarrassments which attend on what is called the choice of a profession; they are tyrannized over for a long time, or at least impeded in their progress by the importunities of their relations, if not by their own necessities: there is hardly one in whom the first efforts of genius have not been combated as a passion which it was necessary to repress, or at least to watch over as something dangerous. Enfeebled by distress, still more grievous than restraint, it was even amidst the toil of ignoble occupations, very opposite to the natural bent of

their inclination, that the greater part have given birth to those productions which have established their fame.

There are therefore very few amongst them of whose abilities the public may be supposed capable of forming an adequate opinion.—At an age when cultivation, exercise, and liberty, are necessary to nourish, call forth, and strengthen their talents; care withers, and slavery stifles them. When the reputation is established, it is then again too late, they then become enervated by rest and plenty. When young, literary men are removed from the world, with which a moderate commerce, sought for on the one hand without degradation, and granted on the other without the pomp of patronage, might serve greatly to their improvement; at a more advanced period of life, they are hurried into it, courted, caressed, and become so absorbed in its pleasures, as to have no time left for labor and study.

It was far different with Mr. Voltaire. Every thing seemed to concur in favoring and assisting that love of glory and of science which he inherited from nature. A settled fortune which devolved to him at an early period of life, left him in his youth at full liberty to gratify this passion, and freed him from those obstructions which

which a timid family would not have failed to throw in his way.

The care of his youth was entrusted to the Jesuits, whose knowledge of the human mind, and whose care to excite emulation in their pupils, at least cannot be denied them. At thirteen years old, they announced him as a prodigy, who would produce a revolution in literature. Thus, even at this early age, had he acquired, through their favor, a species of celebrity.

Ninon de l'Enclos, that celebrated beauty who arrived at fame by a road through which other women are conducted to infamy, she who, after having been adored by the old men of the last century, was idolized by the young ones of the present; who was regarded as one of the arbiters of good taste of every kind, made honorable mention of him; she distinguished him in her will, and, by the nature of her legacy, which was a sum of money to purchase books, pays him a tribute due, in her opinion, to his rising genius.

The friends of Ninon introduced him to the Vendomes, the Chaulieux, and to the Duchess of Maine and her courtiers; philosophic voluptuaries, perhaps somewhat satyrical, but with enlightened minds, and who retained all the elegance and urbanity of the age of Lewis the XIVth.

united

united with that liberality of sentiment which prevailed at his death. Amongst such characters, there was much to be learnt by a young man, more especially in whatever related to taste.

Thus ushered into life, his first productions arrested the attention of all France; his youth gained him the favour of the women and the court; even thus early, the encouragement he received was general, the criticism and malignity of the few was lost in the admiration and applause of the many. If his first successes drew on him some rancorous foes in the lower departments of literature, they amply repaid him in the protection of several persons of high rank, who became the more warmly attached to him, as from his fortune, he was placed above all interested views; and as he seemed to solicit his friends only to co-operate with him in promoting his reputation, they had it in their power to afford him proofs of their attachment on very easy terms.

To complete his good fortune, when he commenced his literary career he found no rivals who could, or ought to have indulged a hope of eclipsing him. Rousseau was overwhelmed with misfortunes. Crebillon and La Motte did not seem to threaten a very formidable contest: little penetration and self-love seems to have been necessary in the author of Oedipus to perceive that
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not only the theatre, but even the poetry of France, would shortly have him alone for their support.

Add to all these favourable circumstances, those gifts he had received from nature; a prodigious memory, a quick conception, a state of health sufficiently robust to sustain the most arduous labor, and too delicate to bear any other excess; a facility of composition, which lessening the fatigue of study, rendered relaxation less necessary to him, and his triumphs more numerous and frequent.—It may by this time be conceived, that, with less natural abilities than Mr. Voltaire possessed, he must have excelled all his contemporaries.

Lastly, let it be recollected, that having been early initiated in the most brilliant circles, in such as were most capable of forming his taste, and polishing his style; two thirds of his life, that is to say, those years which other writers lose, as I have before observed, in struggling with the difficulties of life, those which are lost between the desire of establishing a name, and the necessity of obtaining a provision; that time which others almost wholly devote to enjoy in ease, the honors they have earned with difficulty, was by him dedicated to retreat and to sedulous application. Let it be remembered
too,

too, that having from his youth constantly had at his command books, secretaries, and copyists, and consequently been placed in a situation where no opportunity of gaining, or retaining his ideas, could be wanting, he had it in his power to spare much time, which being however employed, in some measure doubled his literary capacity and resources. Arriving at his laborious retreat, with immense materials as we may say both in his head and in his portfolio, the surprise will partly cease, that he was able to multiply, with a fertility of invention which hitherto seemed peculiar to writers on divinity, or of romance, those striking productions, many of which are worthy of being regarded as models of our literature.

But this is not all. Perhaps we are too apt to annex the idea of extraordinary to the union of several talents in the same man; perhaps it is only thought so uncommon, because prejudice has taught us to consider it as impossible. We deride those Egyptian legislators who confined their subjects to the cultivation not only of a single art, but even to part of one: this appears to us absurd, and we notwithstanding imitate them in the arts of the mind.

Should a physician, or even a lawyer, discover a taste for letters, it is sufficient to discredit

credit him in his profession, render him suspected among his fellows, and of little estimation with the public. If a poet chances to write on some serious subject in prose, a history for example, or a treatise on geometry, or legislation, every one is struck with astonishment; the success even of these extravagancies makes no addition to his former reputation, and may do it an injury: should a soldier hazard a few rhymes, whether on his own accomplishments, his reputation, or his gallantry, he may gain some applause, but rest assured, he will not, on that account, be more esteemed in his corps: his military talents will most assuredly be less regarded; and he may think himself happy if a secret murmur does not prevail, that with his poetical trifling, he is likely to do little honor to the regiment.

It may nevertheless afford much more rational ground for surprize, to find a man whose capacity is confined to a single point, than to meet with others in whom several are found united.—Parts, in general, have a near affinity to each other; and perhaps, there are very few, if any, that are absolutely incompatible.

What is it we mean by genius? It is the facility of conceiving, and the aptitude of expressing ideas whether by words or actions; and shall these

these powers have but one application? Shall they be absorbed in the first employment, which chance or reflection may have pointed out? It were to say that the pencil with which Titian painted his Venus's, would not serve alike to form the Titans of a Julio Romano.

It might seem, indeed, that those turbulent qualities which constitute a hero, would be rarely found united with that serenity of mind necessary in a good orator, or an able writer; experience, however, has shewn that they are by no means incompatible. Thucydides, Xenophon, Cæsar, even Cicero, and several others united them; and if in modern times such instances are rarely to be met with, it is owing to the prejudice I have mentioned. It is this which has separated and divided the different departments of science, beyond all resource, and has thrown up such barriers between them as nature never intended.

Those at least who are embarked in the tranquil departments of science, have not at present even the least incompatibility to contend against: yet when a poet touches on natural philosophy, astronomy, &c. we decry the attempt as rash and indiscreet: in our colleges, however, are we not told that the knowledge of Homer was universal, and descended even to a particular

particular acquaintance with the lowest mechanism? Was not Plato, whose prose is much more poetical than the verse of many poets, a geometrician? Has he not too much indulged in the theory of that science, in digesting his philosophical ideas? Has not Aristotle also written on natural history, politics, logic, poetry, and morality? And was not Cicero equally eminent as a moralist, and a profound dissertator on those points of philosophy most interesting to mankind?

If more examples are wanting, has there been one eminent painter, at least of those who have given a free scope to their genius, who has confined himself to that art alone? Michael Angelo was a great painter, a still more eminent sculptor, and an equally good architect. Leonardo de Vinci produced excellent pictures, while engaged in the study of music, in drawing plans of canals, and in works wherein he displayed all the boldness and capacity of an excellent engineer. Raphael was likewise both a poet and a musician. In short, if instances of this versatility of genius are rare in modern times, we must attribute it, first, to the effects of that prejudice which, in exalting it into a kind of prodigy, takes from those whose natural abilities might enable them to renew the illustrious examples, the idea even
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of making the attempt.—Secondly, to those impediments and depressing cares which, as I have before remarked, almost ever attend the juvenile years of men of parts, and which deprive them at once both of power and inclination to embrace the various departments of science: though its branches are nearly allied, and interwoven with each other; though the same genius which animated a Virgil or a Racine, would have made a Raphael; though an Hippocrates might have shone out a Tacitus, had he begun early to delineate historical characters, instead of collecting medical aphorisms; and though the only difference between them consisted, perhaps, in habits contracted at an early age: habits by which they were fettered during the remainder of their lives, and they died not only without discovering, but even without suspecting in themselves the talents they possessed.

Mr. Voltaire, even at his first outset, being freed from these shackles, possessed his abilities in their full force, and as these were great from the prodigality of nature, so were they enlarged by incessant application. He had already attained the art of increasing his varied productions with ease, often successfully contending with those writers who had been exclusively engaged in their respective departments.

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This consideration detracts nothing from his merit, and may serve to lessen the concern of the public under its loss by the emulation it has a tendency to excite in others.—It was even necessary to enlarge upon it here, in order to rescue his memory from the reproach but too often repeated during his life, of levity or indiscretion, founded on the variety of his productions.

In reviewing his works we shall divide them according to their different subjects, and successively proceed to examine the respective merits of each class: he was a poet and of every kind: he was a prose writer and distinguished himself on all subjects; he has treated on philosophy and the demonstrative sciences; but above all, it was to morality and that part of reasoning which comprehends politics, and more especially religion, that he particularly devoted himself.—Hence naturally results the order of this inquiry.

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FIRST

FIRST PART
OF
MR. VOLTAIRE'S
POETICAL WORKS.
EPIC POEMS.

MR. Voltaire made two efforts to gain the Epic Laurel, denied to every French writer before him who had the ambition to aspire to it. Has he been more successful than his predecessors? Has he vindicated the French nation from the supposed disgrace of not having as yet produced an epic poem? Of remaining wholly destitute of that glory granted with so much honor to Greece, and lavished, as it were, on Italy?

Many are of opinion that he has not. Some there are too, who willing to reconcile their severity with a patriotic sentiment, and con-

ceiving the national honor interested in its being able to boast on any terms of one epic poem at least, have dignified Telemachus with that epithet; as if a romance in prose, could properly be reckoned among the treasures of French poetry; or as though the universal reproach under which our language has labored of pretended sterility in the epopeia were not in reality a disparagement to it.

But the truth is, that we not only have collections of verses of this description, but our language has proved as prolific in this species of composition as all the other languages in Europe put together. An epic poem signifies a recital made by the poet, in contradistinction to the drama, wherein a set of personages are introduced, by whose speaking and acting the piece is conducted. Now it appears to me very absurd that it should be said of a language that it is incapable of producing such works, while it possesses in the proportion of more than ten to one of them; as we might instance in the *Louisiad* of P. Lemoine, the *Alaric* of Scudery, the *Clovis* of Desmaretes, the *Pucelle* of Chapelain, &c. &c.

But it will be said of these recitals, of these epic poems, are they good? This is quite another matter. If in every department of literature the name that distinguishes each species were to
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be applied to such works only as had attained the height of perfection, would the titles of tragedies, comedies, odes, &c. be so confidently applied as at present? The Italians do not refuse the title of epic poets either to Trissino or Dante, who are not heard of beyond the Alps, and who are in trifling repute with their own countrymen. The English unanimously decree that honor to Milton, who remained a long time in obscurity and contempt even among themselves, and who is not yet in general estimation with other nations. Why should we be more scrupulous or unjust towards those, who amongst us have moved in the same sphere?

It is true that the delicacy of the language and the refined taste of the nation have not been sufficiently attended to by our heroic poets. With a minute attention to every other rule, they have failed in that grand particular, which should be universally deemed of most importance in every literary production, that of pleasing and creating an interest by the general design of the work, the episodes, and the stile: they have possessed imagination without taste; and composed verses without poetry: it is this, that hath condemned their works: and although they are at least as much entitled to the epithet of epic poems as the Iliad itself, they are properly excluded from the number of those productions

destined to immortality. May that portion of Mr. Voltaire's works which, agreeably to the definition I have laid down, are incontestably epic, expect a happier fate? Let us enquire; to begin with the *Henriade*.

I shall not examine if Mr. Voltaire has exactly observed the rules of Aristotle, or of Father le Bossu, or whether in any work, either poetical or prosaic, any other can be prescribed than the universal ones of pleasing, affecting, and instructing. Rules can have no other end than that of rendering a work capable of producing these effects; whoever has succeeded in this respect, has observed all the rules, or such as he has transgressed were not necessary.

Among the small number of productions on which, by common suffrage, this merit is conferred, may be distinguished the *Iliad*, the *Æneid*, the *Jerusalem Delivered*, and the *Orlando Furioso*. Now I can discern no real resemblance in these pieces, but in the excellence they possess in common, of exciting attention, and interest, of occupying the imagination, and rousing the affections, of presenting to the mind a variety of events, either striking from their grandeur, affecting from their tenderness or simplicity, interwoven with art, and rendered pleasing by the charms of poetry. To estimate the excellence

lence of the *Henriade* we have therefore only to enquire, if it possesses any of these characteristics.

It must be instantly apparent, that the subject is in itself the most happy, the most fertile, and most truly epic, that any poet has hitherto made choice of; that it is admirably calculated for the developement of the noblest passions, and of course very proper for supplying ingenious episodes, and interesting narrations.

The *Iliad* turns upon a domestic and personal quarrel between two princes. The argument of the *Æneid* is a relation of the travels and voyages of a single fugitive, in search of an asylum for himself and some of his distressed countrymen who surround him. The *Jerusalem* presents at first view a grander subject, that of recovering the Holy Land: but, in fact, the true object of the poem, is the siege of a single city, and that part of the enterprize which is most respectable, is not that which the poet has endeavoured to render most conspicuous. With regard to *Ariosto*, he appears to have no object at all; at least his only one seems to be, to unite in his *Orlando* all the qualities in which the excellence of such a poem consists.

Thus of the four works I have enumerated, whatever beauty, grandeur, and machinery they contain, is wholly to be attributed to the imagi-

nation of the poet. Like Prometheus, they at once gave existence and animation to their Pandoras.

In the *Henriade*, on the other hand, history supplied a ground of action, characters, and incidents in great variety, ready at hand. We see a great kingdom divided into two parties, who wage the most cruel war against each other. Religion becomes intermixed with ambition, and increases their animosity. A foreign family, by availing itself of their mutual dissension, forms the daring project of overturning and usurping the throne. These designs are opposed by a hero endowed with every great and amiable virtue, who, supported by his personal merit alone, and the effect of an invincible firmness and dignity of mind, at length succeeds in extinguishing the flames of civil war.

Thus, whatever intrigues and violence boundless ambition may create among the nobles; all the transports, fervility, and crimes, with which fanaticism and habits of obedience may inspire the populace; all that attachment to royalty, and those generous virtues which true heroism gives birth to in that class of men, more especially devoted to the paths of honor; all naturally enter into the representation.

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The state of men's minds, at the time of which we are speaking, was no less interesting, nor less favorable to epic poetry, than the circumstances themselves: on every side new objects croud on the beholder: the policy of states altering with the situation of the world, which within fifty years was enlarged, if we may so say, by one-half, till then unknown. Commerce, by a revolution no less surprising, had from the centre of Europe connected the extremities of Asia. Philip too, whom these wonderful discoveries seemed principally intended to aggrandize, was the great enemy to the hero of the *Henriade*, and by a singular fatality, while assisting the revolted subjects of the latter in expelling their lawful sovereign, was himself braved and conquered by his own subjects, whom the oppression of his government had excited to revolt. That monarch, while supporting the League, was unable to reduce the United Provinces to obedience, confederated together for their mutual defence against his tyranny.

As to characters, history at this period furnishes a number of remarkable ones already delineated, and as it should seem formed to make a striking figure in an Epic Poem. Among foreign nations we discover a Philip II, gloomy, dissembling, bloody, and hypocritical; an Elizabeth,

beth, crafty, interested, jealous of her glory, and still more of her tranquillity; a Sixtus V. haughty and impetuous, but enlightened and just, more of a king than a pontiff; a prince of Orange, ambitious of power and glory, but wise enough to perceive that Holland once separated from Spain, could exist by liberty alone; laboring himself therefore to deliver her from the bondage, without wishing to supply the place of the tyrant whom he was to dethrone, and contenting himself with a reward founded on gratitude; a duke of Parma, a great general, phlegmatic, still more ambitious perhaps than the prince of Orange, but restrained by opposite duties, and less assisted by favorable events.

In France we see a Henry III. weak and imprudent, enervated by pleasure, and degraded by trifling; intermingling devotion and disorder, scandal and religion; a duke d'Epemon rendered odious by his pride and his caprice, using his fortune with an insolence equal to the baseness by which it was acquired. The two Birons men of courage and of parts, but the one more desirous of riches and of power, than of the public welfare; the other vain and presumptuous, and calculated to lose in extravagant projects the merit and reward of his brilliant actions; a Sully haughty and oeconomical, and
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animated with almost an equal attachment towards his religion, his country, and his sovereign; a Crillon the intrepid emulator of Bayard, *The second knight without fear and without reproach*, equally daring at court, and in the field of action; a Brissac, and d'Aumont, illustrious from their own and their ancestors exploits; a duchess of Montpensier at first distinguished by her beauty, afterwards by her intrigues; enraged by resentment, and seeking by the exile, deposition, and even the death of Henry the Third, to revenge a personal affront rather than to serve her party, or punish the destroyer of her family; a duke of Mayenne cool, ambitious, possessed of great abilities, but without the fury of an enthusiast, or the vices which perhaps are necessary for the leader of a party; and a thousand others might be pointed out in the church, the army, the law, and among the commonalty.

Henry IV. is here certainly surrounded by a greater number of principal characters than are to be found in the whole *Æneid*, and as many as the *Iliad* itself presents. We see them ready pourtrayed, and it is before the eyes of their grandchildren that the poet brings them again into existence; an advantage that Homer alone possessed among the epic poets, for it may be conjectured

jectured that he, like Mr. Voltaire, wrote in an age not far removed from that of his heroes^a.

The latter then, both from the subject and the events, had a thousand times less difficulties to encounter, and more resources to resort to, than any of his predecessors. All he had to do, was by a happy fiction, to reanimate these dormant particles scattered abroad over the wide field of history, to set them in motion on a theatre properly disposed to exhibit them to advantage, and to form them into a body, which

^a It is an advantage in point of interest, perhaps a disadvantage in point of poetry, in the liberty of inventing fictions, and in the arrangement of facts. But Homer was not embarrassed with these difficulties: he has availed himself of every bold and grand idea his imagination dictated to him; which he was not deterred from adopting by the fear of offending or contradicting history. Speaking to the children, he has drawn their fathers so great, that the mind of man has never yet been capable of producing any thing which could do away their impression.

With an equal portion of genius it is possible then at any time to have produced the like prodigy. A divine spirit of poetry is necessary to metamorphose into demi-gods men so near ourselves; but possessed of the genius, any one may perform the miracle. That the characters should be recent and their memory dear to us, must then be attended with superior advantage. What Frenchman would not more readily admit the apotheosis of Henry the Great than that of Childebrand.

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having truth for its animating principle, should be clothed and adorned with all the soft illusions of fable, and the richest embellishments of poetry. This is what the *Henriade* ought to have been. Let us now see what it is. It is impossible to conceal the avowal: no; the *Henriade* has nothing of all this. It is wholly deficient in action; the author has not even availed himself of the numberless valuable materials which were at his disposal: he has not added to the subject any of those ornaments which the nature of it required, and with which an imagination tolerably fertile might so easily have enriched it; he has even weakened the few embellishments which he has endeavoured to borrow from preceding poets.—This I shall endeavour to explain.

Of the inaction, and consequently the coldness which prevails throughout this poem, we need but open it to be sensible. It will be found to abound with beautiful descriptions, but hardly a single animated being. They are highly finished medallions, adapted to the decoration of a gallery, not living characters crowding into it.

To begin with Sixtus the Fifth. It is in his reign that the poet sends Discord to the Vatican in search of Policy, to come and corrupt the

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Sorbonne: this certainly was the occasion wherein he should act in the poem, at least as much as he really does in history; in any case, it is from him that Policy ought to receive her orders and instructions. But there is nothing of all this.—We find, contained in fifty verses, a very fine description of ancient and modern Rome, of the different revolutions of the Holy See, of its losses and acquisitions; but, after all, it is but a description. A portrait of Sixtus the Fifth follows in eight verses, after which he disappears and is never again heard of. It is not from any regard to his dignity that the author has thus consigned him to oblivion, since the principal quality by which he is here distinguished, is that of fraud; for of eight verses which relate to this pontiff, seven are taken up in describing his propensity to cheating, which has not even the merit of being an historical fact.

It is the same with the queen of England, and the king of Spain, Henry the Third, and the principal French officers. These the poet should more especially have endeavoured to engage in action, to have placed them in situations wherein their virtues or defects might have been rendered conspicuous, in order to contribute to the

the interest and general design of the poem; and this is what he has not done; the greater part of those characters which I have before enumerated are not even mentioned, or he has been satisfied with barely mentioning them.

Henry the Third is introduced in a narrative at London but to be censured³, and at Paris but to be assassinated. Biron represented as the bosom friend of Henry the Fourth, as the Hephæstion of this Alexander, appears but once, solely for the purpose of receiving this eulogium, after which we know not what becomes of him. Mornay is brought on three or four times, twice to furnish an occasion for saying the same thing in different terms, namely, that he is a philosophic leader detesting war, notwithstanding en-

³ We may even say to be cruelly and indecently traduced. —It is his ally, his presumptive heir, his ambassador, who speaks, and while uniting in his own person these three several characters, he twice charges him in direct terms in the same verse with baseness. Speaking of the duke of Guise, his crimes and his death, Henry the Fourth says,

The king from whom he wrested his authority,
Basely endur'd, and meanly reveng'd his wrongs.

This is true, but was it the part of his representative to declare it. In every page of the *Henriade* may be traced the philosopher in the author, or the author philosophizing; the personages themselves never speak in their own character.

gaged

gaged in it from complaisance to others, but without destroying any one.

“ Detesting war, and singularly brave,

“ Knew boldly to face death, but never gave.”

which, though very fine in philosophy, is very dry and insipid in a poem, more especially as this sage in his whole conduct confines himself to his part of an automaton, and acts elsewhere with as little energy as he does in battle.

Those personages who are sometimes placed in situations somewhat animated, retain them but for a short time: it is even by forced epithets, or adventitious helps, that they are inefficiently characterised. We have the valiant Turenne, and the prudent Mayenne, Harley that noble leader, and Potier the man of virtue, together with the Sixteen, rendered eminent among the factious by their crimes.

But Turenne is a valiant knight, who fights a duel, and who is heard of neither before nor afterwards. After Harley has been put into the Bastile by Buffy le Clerc, the account of which occupies about thirty lines of the poem, after Potier has made a speech to the states, which contains with all its appendages about sixty, they both disappear never to be seen more: the states themselves

selves are but the apparition of a moment, and have no influence on any thing.

The duke of Mayenne, the second character, and in a degree the hero of the poem, the Hector of the French, who at least for a time should divide our interest and regard; the duke of Mayenne is himself but a spectator. In battle it is his brother, and not he, who distinguishes himself. In the fanatical procession of the monks, he looks on without interfering. In the preparation for the regicide of Jacques Clement,

Achilles

———“ he sees the fatal blow,

“ And more he knows, than what he seems to know.”

He appears to the states

“ With all the ornaments of kingly pride,”

but to be told he is but a subject; and he hears it without a word in reply: he speaks as little as he acts.

Those sixteen daring commoners, the principal sources of the rebellion, those heads of the League, those rivals of the duke of Mayenne, placed at his side, and, as the poet says,

“ Ennobled by their enmity to kings,

“ And seated by the people next the throne;”

D

these

these formidable sixteen, serve in the *Henriade* but to commit the parliament to the Bastile, and afterwards shut themselves up in a cavern with a Jewish forcerer, to accomplish the destruction of the two kings, by thrusting needles into waxen images. Lastly, Henry the Fourth, towards whom every thing ought to tend as to a common centre, and from whom all should be inspired with existence and motion; Henry the Fourth himself is scarcely more animated than the rest. Of the ten little cantos which compose the poem, one is occupied in relating his voyage to England, two in a very fine story, but productive of nothing, and which gives not birth to any event whatsoever; a fourth in a journey to heaven, performed in a dream, which likewise is nugatory in its consequences; and a fifth he spends in the arms of a little girl whom he meets by accident, for whom he forgets all his serious concerns, and whom he abandons as listlessly as he first took her.

In the five remaining ones what does he do? With regard to the eighth and tenth, wherein may be traced some of the features of the times, we do not even find in the *Henriade* the Henry of history. We may with safety affirm, that as in the episode of Anet his frailties possess a
stronger

stronger relief than his virtues, at least they are described at greater length.

How much unlike the other poets I have mentioned! What fire and animation is there in the *Iliad* during the absence of Achilles? How many leaders on both sides are covered with glory, without its being possible for us to forget that the hero is not present. It is true, when he does appear, he shines alone; but with what art has Homer preserved the honor of Diomedes, Agamemnon, and Ulysses? He has caused them all to be wounded in some of the preceding battles, so that it at least remains a doubt whether it is by the presence of Achilles or their own forced inaction, that they are thrown into a kind of eclipse.

There is less action in the *Æneid*; and this, indeed, is the principal objection made to that admirable poem: but, notwithstanding this, its calm is a whirlwind when compared to the dead stilness of the *Henriade*. Let a comparison be drawn between the tender Dido, and the philosophic Elizabeth, or the easy Gabrielle; the games of Acestes at Anchises's tomb, or the visit to the venerable Evander, &c. with the short morning repast in the island of Jersey, or the dry prophecy of the gentleman hermit; the Sybil and her hell, with the dream inspired by

St. Louis with its detail; in short, the negotiations, descriptions, and battles, with which the last six books of the Latin poem abound, together with that continual attention of the author, to place before the Romans not only their history, but what was still more interesting, the fables of their ancestors; let this be compared with the void of the *Henriade*, its silence on all these subjects, and if any then presume to censure the indolence of the pious *Æneas* amidst so many animated objects, what will be said to that of the Bourbon of the sixteenth century, imitated and rivalled by every object around him.

In the *Jerusalem Delivered*, witchcraft, perhaps, holds too considerable a part; but the remainder is full of life and fire. We sympathize with Armida when she bears away Rinaldo; we partake of her despair when he quits her; we lament with Herminia; and deplore with Tancred the loss of his Clorinda, though it is his indifference which causes the tears of the princess of Antioch to flow. The battles of Tasso, as well described as those of Homer, are more varied, and he had the art of introducing into them Armida, Armida ever amiable, ever interesting, because she is always animated.

Ariosto

Ariosto himself, whose stile of composition is half serious and half burlesque, who seems to give up the reins to an imagination wild, and without any fixed object; even Ariosto himself has not one of his characters, and their number is incredible, who is not in action; not one whose success does not afford us pleasure, or in whose misfortunes we do not sympathize.

In short, each of these poems is a mine of characters, all widely differing, and placed in situations each more interesting than the other. They afford an inexhaustible fund of subject-matter for tragedies, operas, and romances, and the subjects are such as are worthy the imagination of their several authors.—Can a single one of this nature be found in the *Henriade*? Whence is it that fictions thus founded in absurdity, should, under the hand of other poets, have produced such admirable compositions, while a ground-work so true, so noble, so fertile, and so grand, should under that of Mr. Voltaire, have given birth to nothing but puppets without motion and without expression? The coloring, as I before said, is pleasing, but it is a representation of dead, not living characters.

There is besides in epic poetry another kind of action, perhaps no less necessary to it, which though not arising immediately from the ground-

work of the piece, nor having any direct relation to its interest, does not fail to increase it, and which leaves the reader in a soft repose, without causing him to forget the heroes: this is either in the occasional description of countries through which the characters are made to travel, of customs either foreign or domestic depicted in the episodes, or of such arts and sciences as are most capable of exciting curiosity and producing lively imagery.

It is here that the poet may, and even ought, to display all his knowledge. As he speaks in the first person, as he claims to be inspired by the muses, he is at full liberty to create incidents, and as it should be his first care to be always affecting, instructive, or entertaining, he may here without scruple discover the full extent of his acquirements, provided that his instructions are seasonable, and his learning free from pedantry.

This is what Homer and Virgil did not fail to do. The Iliad and the Odyssey are sketches of natural philosophy, policy, history, arts and science, and geography; at least in the latter as far as the knowledge of the Greeks extended, that is to say, to a part of the shores and islands of the Mediterranean, for to these limits were confined their knowledge of the earth.

The

The manners, customs, religion, arts, and laws, the boundaries of states, and the interests both public and private, of communities and individuals, are all here pourtrayed: and this secret charm which immediately excited the attachment of the cotemporary, has probably contributed at least as much as the merit of the poetry itself, to establish that reputation of Homer which time seems incapable of impairing.

Virgil has been careful to imitate Homer in these respects.—The boundaries of the world since the siege of Troy were considerably enlarged, and the field of the *Æneid* is accordingly extended in proportion.

He first presents his hero in Africa; but a narrative ably conducted brings the reader back to Asia, and makes him a spectator of the destruction of Troy, the most celebrated city of that part of the globe.

This leads to the amours of Dido, whom if Eneas had forsaken with more honor, the piece might have vied with every other as the *chef d'œuvre* of epic poetry; and, perhaps, in spite of this defect, may still be regarded as such.—Arrived in Italy, Eneas begins by making his descent into the infernal regions, which gives occasion to the finest representation of the religion, mysteries, and philosophy, and to a display

play of every grand and ingenious idea on these subjects, which the intercourse with the Greeks had transferred to the modern Romans. But while thus engaged in a foreign system of philosophy, the poet does not omit to describe by their ancient names the inhabitants of Italy, their original codes of legislation and their mythology, and even the old topography of Rome and its environs: in short, he has collected together all that antiquity can offer to the memory as sacred and valuable.

Neither Tasso nor Ariosto possess this excellence in an equal degree, but they are by no means wholly destitute of it. The manners of the times are at least represented, the customs of chivalry are observed; we travel with their heroes; the whole world passes in review before the reader; and though their games, particularly in Ariosto, are altogether as extraordinary as their personages, we are less shocked at their prodigies and eccentricities, than we are amused by their machinery and continual bustle. It prevents monotony, and we admire the art by which the poet, always master of his subject, steers without error through the immense labyrinth, from which he seems to have taken no previous measures of extricating himself.

In

In the *Henriade*, the author has prescribed to himself a narrow circle, out of which he departs no more than his hero. The latter is conducted into England, for no other end than to meet St. Bartholomew there. This voyage gives occasion to forty very fine verses on the government and character of the English, but not one circumstance which brings them into action, or incorporates them into the poem; not one event relative to that island, which even in those days was capable of affording so many beautiful episodes.

Discord is transported to Rome, and this furnishes matter, as I have before observed, for a description of sixty verses, but a description wholly speculative and antithetical, without one action or a single fact; when Discord disappears, Rome disappears likewise from the poet and the reader.

With regard to Spain and its inhabitants, all that we find of them in the *Henriade* is the epithet of old Castilian applied to Philip the II^d. which is neither very pleasing nor instructive.

After the conversation at London, and the journey to Rome, the most distant country which appears in our poem is Normandy. The whole scene lies in the vicinity of Paris: the reader is perpetually chained to this spot as well as the poet:

poet: not a single digression to divert him from it; not an idea to relieve him from the painful and disgraceful spectacle, of the French enslaved by tyrannical usurpers, and in rebellion against a monarch as virtuous as he was legal; not an allusion to the manners of the times, or to the ancient customs, or if there are any such, they are false.

Such is the opening of the Sixth Canto.

“ In France an ancient custom we retain,
 When death, resistless, ends the monarch reign;
 When destiny cuts short the smooth descent,
 And all the royal pedigree is spent;
 The people to their former rights restor’d,
 May change the laws, or chuse their future lord,
 The states in council represent the whole,
 Elect the king, and limit his controul:
 Thus our renown’d forefathers did ordain,
 That Capet should succeed to Charlemagne.
 The League, with vain presumption, arrogates
 This right, and hastens to convene the states.”

Nothing can be less correct in every sense than these assertions. Can that be called custom, which is never done? For it never has happened in France, that the people have disposed of the crown, from the blood royal becoming extinct. In the two changes which our history presents, the deposed race had still some branches remaining. Childeric the III^d. was dethroned by Pepin, but he survived his degradation, and his youth gave

gave reason to expect he might have an offspring. The descendants of Pepin experienced nearly the same treatment at the hands of Hugh Capet: but it was not the parliament, or the states, who conferred the crown on the latter, he possessed himself of it by force, and at the time when the posterity of Charlemagne was not extinct. The throne was disputed by a great uncle of the late king, who was not the only surviving Prince of the blood.

It was not the genealogy of Henry the IVth. which was contested in the assembly of the states at Paris: the legitimacy of his right, founded on his filial claim, was never questioned: the League felt this, and so well did they agree as to the right of his house to the throne, that they acknowledged the Cardinal de Bombon, his uncle, as king. It was to his religion they objected: it was as a heretic, and as no otherwise incompetent to the succession, that they assumed a right to exclude him from it.

Such deviations from historical truth are the more inexcusable, as no sort of beauty results from them.

These states too furnish matter for a beautiful episode: this was the proper place to have spoken of their ancient rights and customs; and to have brought forward into action the members most interested

interested in the impending decision, which seems to be expected from this assembly: and we find only a mute scene, as short as it is insipid. It occupies scarcely one hundred verses of the poem, fifty consist of a speech which is made in the assembly, and which in itself appears sufficiently strange, after the author has said,

“ No deputies are there discreet and bold,
Our poor remains of freedom to defend,”

We are very much astonished at seeing the only orator who does speak in it, is a counsellor of the Parliament, and that he actually does claim those liberties. So much dryness, joined to such languor and inaccuracy, is the more surprising in a subject, which, as I before remarked, furnished the richest fund that ever an epic poet resorted to.

But it seems that Mr. Voltaire, instead of seeking to avail himself of this richness, was fearful of shrinking under its weight. Far from endeavouring to improve it to its full extent, one would be led to imagine his only aim was to contract it: he has chalked out his career, like an infirm man, who, dreading to find it too long, used every means to shorten it.

We perceive in every page that he is in haste to get to the end of his work: instead of seeking,
as

as the models of the Epopeia have done before him, by happy illusions, artfully to prolong the pleasure and admiration of his readers, he thought he could not get rid of them soon enough. We may observe in the shortness of his cantos, in the studied brevity of the few incidents which he introduces into them, how much he felt oppressed under the arduous attempt; the Battle of Ivry scarcely contains three hundred verses, one-third of which are engaged in the relation of a pathetic anecdote, but taken elsewhere, that of the young D'Ailly: it is wholly from Ariosto; and how far does the copy fall short of the original!

But what seems most unaccountable is, that writing to a people, among whom the women have at all times made so considerable a figure; having made them appear with so much *eclat* in his tragedies, having chosen for his essay in the Epopeia an epoch wherein, if they did not shine with most lustre, they acted with more spirit and violence than in any other; Mr. Voltaire has assigned them no part in his poem: for I call not an epic part the little daily frolic of the 9th canto, this weak and servile copy of Tasso, in which is to be found as little passion as decency.

Gabriella, that favored beauty, who possessed so large a share not only of the love but the confidence of Henry IV. and by whom, notwithstanding,

withstanding, he did not always suffer himself to be influenced; Gabriella, who for some time had reason to hope, and not without good grounds, of becoming queen; ought to have been one of the principal actresses on the epic stage, or not have made her appearance on it at all. It would have been better to have excluded her wholly, than to have made of her a petty adventress unknown, and introduced at the end of the poem, to be at once the instrument and the victim of an artifice, which, having no relation to any thing that had passed, terminates without leaving any trace behind it.

The predecessors of the French poet sacrificed every thing, history, truth, and probability, in order to procure women of feeling; and he who possessed this advantage without any effort, has either neglected it, or knew not how to avail himself of it.

Might he not have drawn an interesting part from that famous Duchess of Montpensier, more truly the soul of the League than the Duke of Mayenne; of that implacable woman who always carried scissars in her pocket, to shear Henry III. when he was made a monk; who had been one of the principal ornaments of a court, in which beauty served so eminently to pave the way to political depravity, and to insure its success?

Would

Would not the invocation to love, supplicating him to lay snares for the conqueror of Ivy, have been better put into her mouth than into that of Discord? Would it have been so difficult to have made her one of the principal instruments in the poem, whether she had confined her artifices, in endeavouring to make a conquest of Henry himself, or had extended the snare to several officers of the royalists, and by such means to introduce distrust, discontent, and treason into the army which threatened Paris?

And Mary Stuart, did not history naturally lead the poet to speak of the murder of a Queen of France, so ignobly assassinated by a vindictive rival; of a queen whose misfortunes had so near a relation to the troubles which with-held Henry from the throne she had occupied? Her beauty, her imprudencies, and her calamities, but too well justified by her crimes, did they not constitute her a real epic character, and the subject of an interesting episode?

The Earl of Essex too, so long a favorite of that queen who devoted him to the scaffold, did not his fate present a fit occasion to describe the effects of female passions in general, by bringing the English into action, to pourtray theirs in particular? An event which has furnished a subject for a French tragedy, represented every day,

day, might it not have served equally for that of one canto at least in a French epic poem?

But that would have been to depart from history; Elizabeth never was in love with the Earl of Essex. She was old.—And what signifies that? Achilles perhaps never killed Hector. History relates that the siege of Troy ended in an accommodation dishonorable to the Greeks; and that the siege itself was far from a very glorious expedition. Homer wrote to a generation whose grandfathers probably assisted at these treaties, and had a share in their pretended exploits. Has he been the less lavish in extolling the prowess of his chimerical heroes?

In point of fact, was Henry IV. ever in England? Was Queen Elizabeth to be described in love in the episode? Was love even necessary to render her interesting; to describe her as a woman in action, as a living creature, instead of a lifeless bust?

I say nothing of so many other characters, whose number gives even to the unadorned history of those times a dramatic air, so favorable to the epic subject: I will suppose that Mr. Voltaire may be held excusable in not availing himself of them in that extent of which they are capable, by the powerful aid of some imaginations; but how could it happen that the most singular revolutions,

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revolutions, the most memorable events, should have escaped an author who might be said to have them forced on him at every instant, and who must have been at more trouble to reject than to make use of, them.

Whence is it that he has said nothing of Holland; of that admirable monument of human industry, of this barrier opposed by Despair to despotism; of those natural allies of Henry IV. those irreconcilable and successful enemies of Philip II.? They enter so naturally, so necessarily into the plan of the *Henriade*, that it must have been by an effort of labour and reflection, that they were excluded from it.

How happens it, that not a word is said about the conquests of the Portuguese in Asia, or of the Spaniards in America; of those immense and invaluable dominions, all united under the power of the fortunate Philip, and whose treasures enabled him to support the league in their rebellion?

The novelty of these events, the importance of these possessions, and the preponderancy they gave to Spain in the scale of power; the rising rivalry of the French, who began to view them with an envious eye, did not all this enter into the subject of a poem, whose epocha is fixed at the end of the 16th century, and in which the actors are Frenchmen, Englishmen, and Spaniards?

E

But

But how to pass from the river Eura to the seas of Mexico and Calicut? From Paris to Vera Cruz, or Goa? How? By an effort of imagination, as Virgil has done in making Æneas and Dido contemporaries, who lived at the distance of three hundred years from each other; or like Tasso, who seriously enlists as a soldier under Godfrey of Bologna; a Rénaldo, that never existed; and assigns to him a mistress, an Armida, no less chimerical: or again, like Ariosto, who pleasantly gives to the fabulous Rolando a rival, and a successful one in the affections of an ideal Chinese princess, an Eastern Shepherd; of whom copies are not uncommon in France, but whose original is no where to be met with but in the poet's brain. Some means should have been found to draw the Indies to Henry's camp, and it does not appear that such an attempt would have been impracticable, without even offending against probability.

The French protestants had already made more than one enterprize in these distant countries. A Chevalier de Villegagnon had founded in Brazil, in the year 1552, if I mistake not, a colony of protestants, under the orders and with the assistance of the Admiral de Colligni. This expedition not proving successful, some other navigators of the same persuasion had, in 1564,

made an attempt of the like nature on the coasts of Florida, and were there cruelly massacred by the Spaniards. A detachment of Calvinists, under the command of a Chevalier de Gorgues, had crossed the seas, solely to revenge this murder of their brethren upon a people in other respects distinguished for their generosity, but whose soldiers in this age, and more especially in these newly discovered regions, seem too often to have lost sight of the magnanimity natural to their country.

Might not these martial navigators, attached by birth and religion to Henry IV. and his contemporaries, have made their second appearance with probability in the *Henriade*, and achieved new exploits against the Spaniards, in relating the past?

Besides, as there were many Castilians and Portuguese in the armies of the League, would it have appeared extraordinary, that some of these should have served under the successors of Cortez or Pizarro? Might they not have had in their suite some Mexicans or Incas? Might not Villegagnon, or the Chevalier de Gorgues, have brought over some natives? When Charles the XIIth. gained the battle of Narva, he made prisoner among the Russians on the borders of the Baltic, a Tartar prince, born near the Palus

Meotides. Might not the French poet have brought into the battle of Ivry, a descendant of Montezuma or Hufcar, and caused him to be disarmed by the French monarch? Overpowered by the generosity of his conqueror, the Indian might relate to him the disasters of his country, and resolve to revenge her wrongs, in taking part with those who had justice on their side, against rebels, supported in their contumacy by her destroyers.

Might he not have met a mother, a sister, or a beloved mistress, carried off by the Rochellois, in some of their expeditions against the new American settlements of the Spaniards? Their gratitude, their conversion, their happiness, or their new distresses; if the author determined that his new Abradates, in signaling his gratitude for the French Cyrus, should, like him, be torn from his Panthea; might not all this, have furnished matter for an episode, at once varied, pathetic, and sublime?

Would any reader have accused the poet on this occasion of boldness, or of failing in probability? Would not even reason itself join in applauding the fiction, and does not true philosophy offer here as many, and even more helps to poetry, than the flights of imagination?

In

In thus rejecting beauties which naturally arose out of the subject, has Mr. Voltaire substituted others in their room sufficiently splendid to prevent our regret? Is it to display his own riches that he seems to have disdained those which his subject offered? I see in his whole poem but three pieces which deserve the title of episodes; that is, where he has endeavoured to detach himself from history, and to give loose to imagination; the one is the journey to England, in the first canto; the next that to heaven, performed in a dream, in the 7th; and the third, which is a journey likewise, but somewhat different from the other two, is that of the *Shepherdess d'Anet*, in the 9th canto. Unfortunately if these are not taken from materials supplied by history, they are copied from the *Æneid* and the *Jerusalem*, which alone detracts from them a great part of their merit.

I know it will be said, that by an established right every modern writer is at liberty to borrow from those who have gone before him, without incurring censure; Virgil borrowed from Homer, Ariosto and Tasso from Homer and from Virgil; the descent into hell is taken from the *Odyssey*; Alcida and Armida are drawn after Dido. From this adoption of foreign ideas, when naturalized and embellished in their own language,

poets have never yet been charged with want of powers, or barrenness of invention.

No, doubtless, when they do embellish them. Thus compare the 6th book of the *Æneid*, with the invocation of the departed spirits in the *Odyssey*; and then see if Virgil can be regarded as a copyist. In the Greek poem, Ulysses digs a hole at the mouth of a cave, which has a communication with Tartarus, he pours into it the blood of several victims; the souls then immediately flock thither to drink of it; until they have drunk they recognize no one: and notwithstanding this blindness, and their ætherial nature, the sight of a sword frightens and disperses them: at length when they are admitted to partake of this potent liquid, they recognize Ulysses, and tell him a number of silly, or if you will have it so, ingenious conceits, worthy of all this preparation.

Virgil's descent into hell is as much superior to this gross puerility, as a perfect and finely cut diamond is to the sand in which nature formed it. Are the imitations of Mr. Voltaire equally happy?

The first, which is his visit to London, leads but to an insulated recital; Elizabeth is there for no other end but to hear him, and wish him a good journey; not a single feature is introduced

roduced that bears any relation to the manners of the English, to the magnificence of London, or to its commerce; to the memorable reign of Henry VIII. and the manner in which the daughter of Anna Bullen had acquired the throne, after being excluded from it. We see in this canto, as in the print which serves for its frontispiece, but a closet, a man seated who is speaking, and a woman seated also and attending to him.

What a falling off is here from the original ! The poet begins with a description of the founding of a superb city; before he introduces his hero telling his own story, he first relates that of the place of which it is natural for him to speak, and of the sovereign who is his auditor. The artifices of Venus have already prepared the reader for the consequences of this tale on the unfortunate queen, and indeed attention leads her to affection. She indulges a flame for a hero who so gracefully relates his misfortunes. She gives way to a passion which appears in itself innocent, and which is even sanctioned by policy; and she falls a victim to it. The description of her love, of her despair, and the catastrophe with which it concludes, is at once a master-piece of sentiment and poetry, which has never yet been equalled in any language.

Lastly, By an effort of genius which cannot be sufficiently admired, this piece, which abstractedly considered, and stripped of every other merit than the perfection of the picture itself, would have excited the constant wonder and the admiration of men of every country, was to the Romans interwoven with one of the most remarkable events of their history: it accounted for the origin of that irreconcilable hatred, which had so long prevailed between the descendants of Dido and of Æneas, between Rome and Carthage; and in some measure justifies the ruin of the latter—crushed at length by the power of her more fortunate rival. Every man of letters knows, and can recite by heart, those verses which will retain their novelty to the end of time,

Rise some avenger of our Libyan blood,
With fire and sword—pursue the perjurd brood;
Our arms, our seas, our shores opposed to theirs,
And the same hate descend on all our heirs.

DRYDEN.

Does the feeble French imitation retain the least trace of these beauties, and more especially the last, which, by a singular similarity of circumstance, should have presented itself to the poet? Is not the rivalry between England and France, between London and Paris, nearly the same?

Was

Was not this the place to have invented a reason equally specious to explain why the straits of Calais, which separate the two countries by the intervention of so small a space, should have made such an immense difference in the minds of their inhabitants.

The kings were then in amity, it is true, but the kingdoms were not; besides, the business was not to copy this effort of genius in the *Æneid*, but to equal it, to substitute another in its stead, which, notwithstanding this temporary agreement of the two people, should bear as pointed an allusion to their secret and hereditary disposition towards each other. With so admirable a model in his view, and while purposing to imitate it, Mr. Voltaire has reduced his peaceful conference between the sceptered ambassador, and the daughter of Henry the Eighth; to mere compliments, portraits, and antitheses.

There is, perhaps, a still greater difference between the dream, wherein a fainted king becomes the guide of Henry the Fourth, and the subterraneous passage in which a Sybil performs the like service to Eneas.—In the same degree that the description of the Latin poet is grand, simple, affecting, clear, and skilfully interspersed with a variety of philosophic, historic, mythological,

logical, and moral matter, that of the French is hurried, monotonous, and obscure.

Virgil, when the nature of the place is too dismal, is careful to relieve the gloom by the successive meeting of Palinurus, Caron, Deiphobus and Dido: there is not even a description of Tartarus, which is not animated by painting and poetry, alike destined to immortality, as in that of the unhappy Tytyus;

A rav'nous vulture in his opened side
Her crooked beak, and cruel talons try'd:
Still for the growing liver digg'd his breast,
The growing liver still supply'd the feast:
Still are his entrails fruitful to their pains,
Th' immortal hunger lasts, th' immortal food remains.

DRYDEN.

or of that celebrated reprobate who calls aloud,

Learn righteousness, and dread th' avenging deities.

DRYDEN.

and many more with which this piece abounds.

The geography of the country is accurately described agreeably to the pagan mythology: the two travellers first pass over the river Acheron, then traverse the entrance into hell, in which there is rather privation of happiness than actual misery. They then arrive at Tartarus itself, in which are atrocious criminals, and real punishments; and, lastly, they reach the Elysian Fields,

Fields, where futurity is unfolded to them on the borders of Lethe. All these distant regions were in effect placed by the fable near each other, and under the same power. The poet is at the same time a majestic philosopher, and an accurate delineator of the religious opinions which prevailed in his days.

But in the *Henriade*, the two kings immediately ascend into heaven, to assist at the judgment of souls; from whence they are transported in a whirlwind into a chaos, where is hell according to the poet, and purgatory according to the saint; near at hand is paradise, and at the end of paradise the palace of the Fatal Sisters. We comprehend nothing of this expedition; it is not conformable to our religious ideas; there is no reason to suppose that the author meant to give it as a system of his own: what is it then? Certainly this blending together of terms and ideas, half pagan and half christian, can never be deemed a beauty, in which we can neither trace the doctrine of one of these persuasions, nor find any of the pleasing illusions which accompany the other. It may even be said that the morality of the latter is far more rigid. Virgil places in that part of hell called Tartarus, not only those guilty of sacrilege, tyrants, and traitors who have sold their country, but voluptuous epicures,

epicures, and, what is much more rigid, those avaricious wretches who have not dispensed a part of their riches among their relations; while the French poet piteously exclaims,

— oh! ye sons of ease,
Must tender spirits dwell in climes like these;
Ye who on flowery couches pass'd away
The tranquil moments of life's useful day.

That we may be the better able to conceive the prodigious distance between the original and his imitator, we must above all bring those passages together wherein by a singular concurrence of circumstances the two poets had precisely the same things to say, the same losses to deplore, and where consequently the modern might, and even ought, to have taken the ancient for his model.

In the *Æneid* we see a young Marcellus, in the *Henriade* a young duke of Burgundy, both born to a throne, both affording the fairest hopes, alike untimely snatched from their families and their country, extolled alike in the poems by the founders of those families, whose glory it is supposed they would have proved; and finally, both recently brought again into existence, to answer the purpose of the poets: since the duke died in 1712, and the *Henriade*, at that time called

called the League, appeared in 1723; but this is all the similarity between them. The lamentations of Anchises are natural, affecting, and expressive of an enthusiasm at once grand and mournful.

The gods too high had rais'd the Roman state;
 Were but their gifts as permanent, as great.
 What groans of men shall fill the Martian field,
 How fierce a blaze his flaming pile shall yield!
 What fun'ral pomp shall floating Tyber see,
 When rising from his bed, he views the sad solemnity!
 No youth shall equal hopes of glory give,
 No youth afford so great a cause to grieve:
 The Trojan honor, and the Roman boast,
 Admir'd when living, and ador'd when lost!
 Mirror of ancient worth, in early youth,
 Undaunted faith, inviolable truth!
 No foe unpunish'd in the fighting field,
 Shall dare thee foot to foot, with sword and shield;
 Much less in arms oppose thy matchless force,
 When thy sharp spurs shall urge thy foaming horse.
 Ah, cou'dst thou break thro' fate's severe decree,
 A new Marcellus shall arise in thee!
 Full canisters of fragrant lilies bring,
 Mix'd with the purple roses of the spring:
 Let me with fun'ral flowers his body strow,
 This gift which parents to the children owe,
 This unavailing gift, at least I may bestow.

DRYDEN.

This is the language of a poet; let us now hear his imitator.

What

What princely youth draws near, whose manly face,
 United majesty and sweetness grace?
 See how unmov'd—Oh heavens! what sudden shade
 Conceals the graces which his form display'd!
 Death flutters round; health, beauty, all is gone,
 He falls, just ready to ascend the throne:
 Heaven form'd him all that's truly just and good,
 Descended Bourbon from thy royal blood.
 Oh gracious God! shall fate but shew mankind
 A flower so sweet, and virtues so refin'd:
 What could a soul so gen'rous not obtain?
 What joys wou'd France experience from his reign?
 Produc'd and nurtur'd by his fostering hand,
 Fair peace and plenty had enrich'd the land,
 Each day some new beneficence had brought:
 Oh how shall Gallia weep! alarming thought!
 When one dark silent sepulchre contains
 The son's, the mother's, and the fire's remains.

What a difference! Does Anchises amuse him-
 self in saying of Marcellus that he was a transi-
 tory flower? Does he apply the epithet of au-
 gust to that blood which springing from the po-
 sterity of his son, was of consequence his own?
 Does he call the most upright of the Romans a
 young man who never was to fill the throne?
 An epithet the more singular in the French au-
 thor, as he had before said of Lewis the Twelfth,
 that that monarch,

Rul'd our realm with justice at his side:

and that of course it is difficult to be more just.
 Does he content himself with saying he would
 have

have loved his people? An eulogium so weak after this verse,

Each day some new beneficence had brought :

an eulogium, moreover, which is but a repetition, since the poet has already said, some few lines above, of the cardinal of Amboise, that

To him alone was Gallia's homage dear,
To him alone her homage was sincere.

And, lastly, let us see if the ancient Trojan more drily breaks off in a cold exclamation on the afflicting image of a tomb, and in an anecdote unintelligible without a note or a previous knowledge of the fact, that this whole family became extinct at once. Anchises does not complain to the gods of their hard treatment of Marcellus; he accuses them of being jealous of him. "The fates will but shew him to the earth; fathers of heaven! Rome, had she preserved him, would have appeared to you too powerful." If he speaks of a tomb, it is that he may join with it an image which gives it animation, and renders the idea affecting and soft. "With what regret shall the field of Mars resound! what tears, oh Tyber! as thou passest the verge of that tomb newly erected on thy banks, shalt thou see shed!" It is not at the expence

expence of the great men of his line that he
 praises his young descendant. "Never shall
 " child have afforded such grounds for the most
 " sanguine hopes, *nec puer.*" It appears to
 me that there is contained in these words an ad-
 mirable delicacy, far from making him eclipse
 the ancient heroes; his greatest merit will be to
 possess their virtues and fidelity; "heu pietas,
 " heu prisca fides!" At length, he thus addresses
 him: "Unhappy boy! should'st thou be able
 " to vanquish the cruelty of thy fate, thou will'st
 " prove a real Marcellus—give me lilies in
 " abundance, that I may cover his dear shade
 " with flowers, that I may at least offer to it
 " this unavailing homage." This is the speech
 of Anchises, as far as the weakness of the idiom,
 and my own want of power enable me to render
 it. We may discover through it the expression
 and the poetry of the original: accordingly,
 though we are neither Augustus nor Octavia,
 and though eighteen centuries are since elapsed,
 this piece forces tears from us.—Can its feeble
 copy do the like? The episode of Gabrielle,
 when compared with those of Dido and Armida,
 is no less inferior in the detail of circumstances,
 and is moreover essentially defective in itself, be-
 cause the hero is debased. Every thing concurs
 to degrade Henry the Fourth in his unfortunate
 adventure

adventure with Anet, as it is represented in the poem.

I have already called it a trick; and what other name can we give to this strange incident, or the manner in which it is conducted, and in which it finishes? to that sudden and tender reconciliation unexpectedly produced through the intervention of Discord to this amour, which arose from chance, and which vanishes like the intrigues of a campaigner, the day after its birth? The reader who reflects finds here but one embarrassment, which is, to determine whether the hero is less when he quits his mistress, than when lying at her feet.

Dido conceives a passion for a stranger; but with what skill is her weakness conducted! how well does she appear justified! how many interesting events are produced from it! The object of her affection is a hero, and the son of the goddess of love; it is under the appearance of generosity that this passion insinuates itself into her heart; Æneas is as unfortunate as he is amiable; his eloquence finishes what his adversity, his form, and the power of his mother had begun; nor was it till a most pathetic tale had displayed his virtues in their full lustre, that she wholly yields herself up to the passion with which

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he inspired her. Besides, she defended herself against it: she for a long time opposed to this rising attachment, her ancient resolution to contract no new alliance, the remembrance of her first husband, a regard to her own glory: nothing is omitted which might serve to give proofs of her virtue, and to render her weakness excusable.

And at length to accomplish her fall, it was necessary that her mind should be previously disposed to tenderness, by that kind of emotion which accompanies the pomp of a splendid festival; Juno and Venus must concert together to overcome her resistance. To effect her overthrow, all the merits of a hero, all the influence of two powerful divinities, all those incidents which, taking the mind by surprise, lead to the discovery of passion, must combine together. And what grandeur, what poetry, what truth is there not in the general representation, and in each particular detail of this unhappy attachment!

Tasso has likewise made his hero in love. He has described him for a moment buried in pleasure: but when Rinaldo abandons himself to the caresses of Armida, independent of the power of magic, by which he is captivated, it is in a time of exile and leisure, at a time when his mind was inflamed with just resentment against his general, and when an order which he could not

not avenge caused his absence from the christian army.

Let it be remembered too, that it is a stranger, an enchantress, free and mistress of herself, by whom he is sought after, the triumph which he gains over her can neither tarnish his own reputation, nor affect the interests of his party; on the contrary, he is still victorious, and almost an hero while suffering himself to be enslaved: it is as we may say honor, which gives him up to love. In short, he is not only in the flower of youth, and consequently in the season when errors are most readily excused, but the passion which he inspires, and which he himself feels, continues long enough to acquire a sort of dignity: for love becomes ennobled by constancy. A considerable interval elapses, and a variety of events take place, between the period which shews him enervated by pleasure, and that which restores him to glory: his transports are not begun and concluded in the same canto.

But Henry, in a mature age, with the experience of misfortune, in the most critical moment of his affairs, delivers himself up to the first appearance of pleasure: at a time, when after gaining a battle, his absence might cause him to lose the fruits of it, he absents himself without reflection, and for what? to seduce a

young person whose innocence he ought, especially after his journey to heaven, to have respected; and what is still more scandalous, and still more inconceivable, this young person is the daughter of one of his old officers, who at the very moment is hazarding his life in his service.

It is the author who informs us,

———she waits her fire,
Who faithful to our kings, and old in arms,
Had follow'd Henry's ensigns in the field.

In return, the great Henry goes to see his daughter, seduces and abandons her, and all this in an instant of time.

But is that the fact? no; first, as I have already said, Gabrielle in history is nothing less than a simple shepherdes, easily seduced and soon forgotten: but were it even the truth, that was not an anecdote that should have been seized and introduced into an epic poem; on the contrary, it should have been wholly suppressed, or metaphorised by an effort of the imagination. The charms of Armida are no where suffered to operate to the prejudice of Rinaldo's fame. This artifice should have been imitated. Were it necessary to speak of the weakness of a hero, it should have been covered with a veil, which would have rescued it from ignominy.

It appears true then, that the author of the *Henriade* has not embellished his subject, that he has even voluntarily weakened it, by neglecting to avail himself of those beauties which naturally arise out of it; and instead of that mixture of fiction which in other epic poems, whose names have been consecrated by time, furnishes the ground of a career at once so rapid, and notwithstanding so well sustained, so varied, and so interesting; we find in this but a frigid monotony; we admire, indeed, the fine verses with which it often abounds, especially in the level and descriptive parts, but the events neither excite interest or passion. In a word, if I may be permitted to give my opinion, the *Henriade* is rather a dissertation in rhyme, an ornamented treatise in verse, on the latter half of the sixteenth century, than a poem.

But it will be said, the author could do no more; he was deprived of one grand resource, open to all his predecessors, that of the marvellous: our religion forbids those fictions which paganism authorised, and our manners such as were tolerated by the customs of chivalry. The Italians, who have immortalised Armida and Rolando, were enabled to substitute the wonders of magic and the illusions of enchantment, instead of the deities of Greece and Rome: this

the name of his hero, the proximity of the time, and the progress of letters in our age, denied to Mr. Voltaire. Affuredly an Ismeno would have made but a poor figure by the side of the duke of Mayenne; we should have condemned the poet if he had, like Tasso, enchanted by a forcerer all the trees of the forest of Bondy, in order to prevent the siege of Paris; and although the charming d'Estrées was, perhaps, in reality more beautiful than the supposed Armida, the Parisian author would not have been excused had he built, by the stroke of a wand, a beautiful magic palace in the midst of d'Anet's park, in which Henry should have been immured within walls of adamant.

I acknowledge it: neither is it these fairy tales which have established the success of the Jerusalem and the Orlando. On the contrary, they would have proved their downfall, or have sunk them into contempt, without those just representations, without those affecting and grand situations, with which the skill of the artists has embellished these chimeras. What father le Bossu ridiculously enough calls the machinery, that is, the intervention of supernatural beings, I do not think at all necessary to the epopeia.

Virgil

Virgil has adopted it, but it is likewise the weakest part of his poem. The gods of Homer do not cast a damp on the Iliad, because they are but men: they have their language and passions, and moreover enter for nothing into the finest parts of this revered poem.

They are not to be found in the parting of Hector and Andromache, nor in that nervous scene, so fraught with varied eloquence, between the deputies of the Greeks, and Achilles refusing them his assistance; they form no part of the adventure of Patroclus, nor of that scene, perhaps still more beautiful than any of the rest, wherein Priam comes to kiss the hand stained with the blood of his son: we cannot consider as an intervention of a divinity, the subaltern part which Mercury performs. It is not, therefore, the marvellous which constitutes the merit of these models in the art of relating, describing, and moving; but these pieces are interesting, because they present nothing but what is natural. In fairy tales the marvellous is profusely introduced; accordingly they interest not: far from the epic poem not being able to dispense with gods, with forcerers, or intellectual beings, however personified; I am persuaded, on the contrary, that the only means of equalling at present the models handed down to us in this species of writing,

writing, and to form others equal to them, would be to set aside these puerile and superfluous expedients.

True epic fictions should consist of events skillfully conceived, artfully arranged, and happily described. These poems are romances in verse; interest accordingly in these, as in romances, should give birth to grand passions, happily seized and ably developed; to incidents, regularly connected and well related; to episodes, which arise without constraint, and interwoven in such a manner as to prolong the action of the poem, without suspending its effect, or weakening its force; in short, an address, a fecundity to multiply situations capable of calling forth the passions, traits which depict the hero but by means of facts, in which they are seen to act, and not of words, which only discover the author.

This is the true machinery of the *Æneid*, the *Iliad*, the *Jerusalem*, the *Orlando*, &c. and not the gods and bugbears, which, if they stood alone, would have been abandoned, with Tom Thumb and Blue Beard, to children. These fictions exist independent of a change of manners, or the variations of prejudice in doctrines or in government; they are allied to the heart, which is always the same; to that natural disposition by which we are always led to admire
what

what is great, to esteem what is ingenious, and to sympathise with what is pathetic. This is the true marvellous, which has succeeded in all ages, and which offers to true poetry a thousand times more resources than all the witchcrafts and enchantments in the world.

Even supposing, with father le Bossu, a machinery still necessary, it is not the impossibility of supplying one which constitutes the weakness of the *Henriade*, since the author, like his predecessors, has availed himself of this help in adopting their inventions; but he has been as unfortunate in this as in his other attempts.

For instance, we see Discord personified in his work, as in the *Orlando*; she is even a personage of much greater consequence; in the Italian poem she plays but a subaltern and momentary part, whereas she is the soul, the mover, and the entire machinery of the French one. To appreciate the imagination of the two poets, we need but compare the effects respectively produced by them from this resource, which they have in common chosen.

In the *Henriade*, Discord is personified in the fourth canto, and she appears for herself alone; d'Aumale is exposed in a sally, she trembles to lose him.

As

As barb'rous as the fiend, she fears to lose
 A life so needful to her, she to his succor flies,
 And 'gainst surrounding enemies his breast defends
 With her vast iron impenetrable * shield.

He escapes from thence; she departs to Rome
 in search of Policy to come and corrupt the
 Sorbonne, an office it appears to me she was
 herself very capable of executing; she makes a
 second journey to hell, to engage Fanaticism to
 come and prepare the assassination of Henry the
 Third, a function which appears neither above
 nor beneath her own power; she then for a mo-
 ment animates the Sixteen, and finishes with an
 invocation to Love to come and enslave Henry
 the Fourth.

In all this, excepting the protection which she
 affords to d'Aumale, and her league with Love,

* It is singular enough that Mr. Voltaire, fearful of giv-
 ing too much into the marvellous, from a regard to the phi-
 losophy of his age, has armed Discord with a shield, which
 Homer himself would never have done. This poet, an exact
 observer of proprieties, never gives this sort of armour but
 to those deities whose attributes it in some sort coincided
 with; to Jupiter, the supreme god; to Minerva, and to
 Mars, the peculiar divinities of war. Neptune, Apollo,
 and Mercury have no shield; when they wish to engage in
 the field they borrow the Ægis, or clothe themselves in the
 armour of ordinary combatants: a proof, in my opinion,
 that even in his enthusiasm Homer did not lose sight of his
 good sense, and that he hazarded nothing without reflection.

which

which are not two very great or marvellous incidents, the history is didactically followed. The Discord of Mr. Voltaire is to be found equally with P. de Thou as in the *Henriade*: this pretended fury is there no longer a poetical personage, but a name given to the spirit which animated the league and its partisans.

This name too is as ill imagined as it is ill applied: with equal propriety might the poet have personified Ambition, Revenge, &c. and have assigned them the same parts which he has to Discord. In the conduct of the latter we perceive nothing characteristic of her name, or rather on the contrary she belies it; for, instead of being employed in causing division, her sole care is to promote union.

It is true, that the object of the union thus effected, is to produce mischief, but this signifies not; to justify her title she should have accomplished this by disseminating disorder, mistrust, and hatred: the object of her manœuvres in the party of Henry, should be to detach his friends from his interests, and to incite them against each other, instead of being confined as they are, to strengthen the union of his enemies.

Would you behold a real Discord, a Discord poetical and active, see one delineated by Ariosto.

A

A cloud of infidels in arms, and in perfect union, threaten Christendom under the command of Agramant, the Agamemnon of these new Greeks. God employing secondary causes for the preservation of his church, sends an angel in search of Discord, and orders her to perplex these miscreants; to excite such divisions in the troops as shall confound and defeat their enterprises. The angel seeks her, and finds her in a chapter of monks, (observe that the Orlando is an heroic poem, a species of which I shall shortly speak,) he announces his commission to her, she departs, and alights on the infidel army.

The camp is immediately filled with dissensions, disputes, and quarrels of every kind: the most important arise among the principal warriors, who determine to settle them by single combat. As there are four whose mutual interests are involved in the most complicated perplexity, they are forced to draw lots to know who is to begin the battle. The lot falls on Mandricard and Rodomant. The day is fixed: whatever concern these disorders, and still more this mode of appeasing them, may cause to the great Agramant, he is forced to consent.

All the customs of knight-errantry are portrayed and described with the greatest splendor by the poet. Two tents are prepared at the
extremities

extremities of the camp, to which the combatants respectively repair, each with his squires, whose office it is to present him with the different pieces of his armour. One of the squires in giving Mandricard his sword, which is that of Rolando, recognises it; he had formerly vowed to conquer this sword likewise, and determines to keep it. A great dispute ensues. Roger, one of the four knights whose combat was delayed by the event of the lots, renews his pretensions, and will no longer respect the order agreed on, because it was infringed by a new competitor. Mandricard challenges both foes at the same time: they all go out in a rage, ready to attack each other; and here are already three duels for one.

Agramant astonished at the uproar, hastens thither with his Nestor, the old Marfillus: whilst they are seeking the means of reconciliation, a dreadful tumult is heard in the other tent. Rodomont was ready to mount his charger, of which he had gained possession after many adventures, when one of the squires examining the harness of the fiery steed, perceives him to be his dear Cream-face, an excellent horse, which had been formerly stolen from him, and since the loss of which he had sworn to go on foot till he should find him again. He instantly seizes the bridle, makes oath

oath that he will never again quit it, and draws his sword in support of his right: hence proceed mutual reproaches, blows, and a horrible tumult.

Agramant leaves Marfillus to restrain one of the tents within bounds, and returns hastily to the other, followed by a great number of the principal officers of the army, all like him much surpris'd at this new mischance. Among these is the haughty Marphisa, an invincible Amazon, arriv'd lately in the Moorish camp, with the sole design of challenging the knight-errants in the army of Charlemagne. Hearing the stolen horse spoken of, she recollects being acquainted with his owner, and that on the same day when he was thus cheated by a knave, she herself lost a rich and valuable sword. She is much surpris'd to find the thief in the suite of d'Agremant, who, to reward him, has made him a king: she falls on the crowned plunderer, drags him to the neck of the horse to hang him, and challenges Agramant himself, if he interposes his authority. This completes the general confusion; and all the interested parties having their troops in the army and their party in the council, the disorder that must result from these divisions in the host of Charlemagne's enemies may be easily conceived.

This is what is achieved by Discord in the Orlando en passant, where she is but an episodic and momentary personage: this is what Ariosto has produced from nothing, what scarcely occupies in his work a quarter of a canto. I know not if in all the ancient and modern poets there is to be found a passage which gives stronger proofs of genius and imagination.

Cervantes has imitated it with considerable art in his Don Quixote; but Cervantes is but a copyist. How weak and inefficient appears, the prosing Discord of the French author, after the active one of the Italian! It is not then owing to the revolution which has taken place in our manners and religion, that the Henriade is so far inferior, even in point of machinery, to the poems which have gone before it.

It abounds with very fine portraits I have acknowledged; but I repeat, these cold inanimate images freeze the poem: other epic works have their portraits likewise, but they result from the action of their heroes; they are not hung up and fastened motionless to a wall, till the eye of the spectator shall happen to catch them: it is the reader, who having seen the characters in action, figures them to himself, their forms, their figure, and physiognomy are present to his imagination,

gination, he has previously conceived an idea of their character.

Does Ariosto wish to display the greatness of soul, the generosity, the haughty heroism of a knight, who is above all things apprehensive lest he should be suspected of seeking to avail himself of unfair advantages in battle, who wishes to be indebted to his prowess alone for his fame; he does not lose time in measuring terms and sonorous verses, metaphysically to describe what passes in the breast of the warrior, he produces on the scene, Roger armed by the enchanter Atlant with a marvellous shield composed of a single diamond, whose lustre at once strikes the beholders blind, and deprives them of all power of motion. This is an imitation of the head of Medusa, but what follows is an imitation of no one.

Roger has taken the shield because it is impenetrable, and because the laws of chivalry do not deny to valour any help that it may derive from the superior temper or solidity of arms; but he carefully covers it with a veil, in order that he may by no means be indebted to its other property.

In the midst of a scuffle however, wherein he is insulted by strangers, who attack him several of them together, a blow is struck on the veil, which
tears

tears it, the fatal light manifests itself; the whole troop in a moment fall motionless, and the hero finds himself out of danger.

But disdaining a premature help, which seems to leave his courage in doubt, he perceives a deep well, into which he hastens to plunge the burning shield, and precipitates it before him, that he may no longer be suspected of relying more on the assistance of magic than his own sword. This trait from Orlando is doubtless fine even in a fabulous hero; and what prevented Mr. Voltaire from creating the like ones under real names?

Whatever had a tendency to elevate the mind, to soften, to surprise, or to interest, has been eagerly adopted by the epic poets, even among the moderns who preceded Mr. Voltaire; they have in some sort prodigally dealt them out with equal profusion and success. Sometimes it is from incidents arising in the common order of events, which are rendered extraordinary by aids derived from genius alone; at others the circumstances, though in themselves romantic, are introduced with such attention to probability, and pourtrayed in a manner so pathetic, that the heart is captivated before the understanding can find time for censure.

G

Thus

Thus that a jealous woman should be driven to reproaches, threats, and even actual violence against a rival, is what often happens, and requires no great effort of the mind to conceive; but that she should enjoy the satisfaction of seeing this rival exposed to the danger of losing her life by the hands of that lover who is thought unfaithful, or of depriving him of existence by her own; that such a one as she should enjoy this scene with delight, and that it should be a probable consequence of contempt, is an interesting fiction, well adapted to the epopeia which is to be found in Ariosto.

That a lover by another mistake, rendered equally probable, should have the misfortune to kill his mistress, while he supposes himself engaging and conquering his mortal foe, is a fiction less natural indeed, but equally distressing, and calculated to move every heart: this is to be found in the Jerusalem, when Tancred takes Clorinda for Argant, whose armour she wore, and it is there admirably managed. Again, a lover equally delicate and faithful, but excluded by the relations of his mistress, a celebrated warrior, is informed that, with the view of repelling all his rivals, and insuring him her hand, she has formed the resolution of bestowing it only upon him who can vanquish her in the lists; that, by a con-

con-

concurrence of extraordinary circumstances, he finds himself compelled to maintain his combat under the name, the arms, and for the benefit of a stranger who had preserved his life; so that if he is overcome, he is liable to the suspicion of having betrayed the confidence of his benefactor, and thus become, in a double point of view, unworthy of his mistress; and, if he proves victor, it must be to throw her into the arms of another. This again is a fiction, which interests and affects the reader in a most sensible degree; and it is the ground of the episode of prince Leon at the conclusion of the Orlando. All the situations, it is true, arise from the mistakes justified by the customs of chivalry. The vizors of the helmets in those times concealed the combatants, who were not otherwise distinguishable but by particular marks, as their horses, their armour, &c. and the custom of fighting with the face uncovered, which preceded our own of braving lead, iron, and fire, with the entire body exposed, deprives our poets of this resource, so fertile in beauty; but how many others remain open to them? With how many models of a different nature do the authors I have enumerated furnish them?

The Henriade, as I have before remarked, has but one single amour, an amour which

occupies but a single canto, which does not depend on the poem, an amour which degrades the hero without exalting the mistress, which afflicts the mind, without affecting the heart. Ariosto has twenty, all varied, all pleasing, all interwoven in interesting episodes, related to the principal action of the poem, and adapted to the several characters of the personages; and in describing which the poet sometimes discovers the tenderest sensibility, at others the most sterling humor.

Isabella and Zerbin are models of honor and delicacy. Roger is more ardent, and Bradamante more empassioned, but always decent. Mendriard is a libertine, and the beautiful Doralixa precisely what a woman should be to prefer such a lover. Rodomonte abandoned by her, plays a ridiculous part: his disaster is comic, and he is, notwithstanding, not disparaged by it. Alcine, Angelica, Medor, and several others, throw into the vast field of the Orlando an inexhaustible variety; there is no mind, no heart but may find materials whereon to exercise the sensibility they possess, whether derived from their natural organization, or from a taste developed and perfected by reflection.

Tasso is less fertile: he is always grave, always majestic; but, as I said before, the tenderness which

which breathes through every page of his work, tempers its elevation.

In the *Æneid* Dido is but an episode, but how beautiful a one ! How soft is the beginning, how animated its conclusion ! In the *Iliad* Briseis is a sort of outwork without action ; but Andromache occupies a grand place in the picture ; and this scene of conjugal love, depicted with the most expressive traits, disfigures none of the passions with which it is surrounded, nor is itself weakened by them. In the *Henriade* we perceive none of these beauties, nor even any thing which can furnish us with the least trace of them.

After these observations, what then are the remaining merits of this work ? First, as I have observed, the title of epic, which is a very inconsiderable one, and the still more essential excellence of containing some very fine verses, and some portraits admirably drawn ; of collecting together in the text and in the notes annexed to it, the principal events of an epocha ever memorable to the French nation ; of furnishing to those amongst them who have the charge of educating youth, some details, which they may compare in their language with the fine descriptions taken from the poets of antiquity. This will not prevent the work from exhibiting the inferiority of

its author, and proves only, that amid the variety of mental powers which nature had profusely endowed him with, she had at least refused him one.

In other respects I am inclined to think, that it is rather owing to the precipitation of Mr. Voltaire's friends than to himself, that we should impute the imperfections of the *Henriade*, and even its existence. He had, as it is well known, conceived the plan, and made his first sketch of it, at an age when it is difficult to conceive that he should be able to do justice to such an attempt, especially while dividing his time, and devoting his attention in the manner he did, to all the subjects of literature. The society he then lived in was composed of friends rather enlightened than rational, possessed of more delicacy than passion, delivered up to a philosophy proper enough for the cultivation of taste, but not calculated to rouse the imagination, and valuing themselves on a peculiar mode of thinking on every subject.

The draught of the *Henriade*, under the name of the League, was very highly applauded by them; they found in it some lively passages against the priesthood which pleased them, and some fine verses which they admired with still more reason: they were not repelled by the coldness of their principles.

principles. Instead of giving the young author such wholesome advice as would have induced him to abandon the design, they loaded him with such eulogiums as induced him to commit it to the press, not only before the coloring was complete, but before any thing was settled either in the design or in the execution.

These praises thus lavishly bestowed, cast an illusion before the public; and even the author himself, fortified by these against his own internal conviction, has all his life long labored to polish his sketch, but he never thought of improving or enlarging the plan of it, and had he conceived the design, perhaps he might not have been able to execute it. He would constantly have preferred the more easy labor of the theatre, and the numberless more pleasing occupations which he had formed, to that profound meditation, and those laborious efforts necessary to form the plan of a good epic poem, and still more to amend that of a bad one.

principles. Instead of giving the young author such wholesome advice as would have induced him to abandon the design, they loaded him with such compliments as induced him to commit it to the press, not only before the coloring was complete, but before any thing was settled either in the design or in the execution.

These parties thus lavishly bestowed, call in attention to the public, and even the author himself, excited by their regard for his own internal conviction, has all his life long labored to justify his choice, but he never thought of improving or enlarging the plan of it, and had he conceived the design, perhaps he might not have been able to execute it. His world of literary have produced the more early labor of the young man, and the number of most pleasing compositions which he had formed, to that profound meditation, and those laborious efforts he still is to be the plan of a good epic poem, and still more to amend that of a bad one.

O.F.

MR. VOLTAIRE'S

SECOND EPIC POEM.

NEARLY about the same time that Mr. Voltaire was thus occupied on the serious epopeia, he adventured to try the burlesque. We find in the history of France a second epocha, almost similar to that which has been the subject of our remarks: that is, the reign of Charles the Seventh; the events and the two monarchs bear a like affinity to each other.

Charles and Henry were both brave, both amiable and indulgent; they alike intermingled pleasures and business, love and war; both were proscribed in their own dominions, and had to wrest from their subjects, supported in rebellion by foreigners, their own territories, which were likewise the same. It was the care of each, when settled on the throne, to re-establish order and plenty in their provinces, that had been so long

long in a state of desolation. Lastly, they both met with a melancholy and premature death; the one perished with hunger, for fear of being poisoned by his son; the other fell by the hand of one of his subjects.

The first difference we perceive between them is, that religion, which occasioned all the misfortunes of Henry, had no influence on the affairs of Charles; and a second is, the surprising event which distinguishes the reign of the latter, in the succour he derived from the Maid, surnamed d'Orleans, because her first exploit was that of making the English raise the siege of that town.

If one of these reigns has been deemed worthy of the epopeia, and capable of furnishing the subject of an heroic poem, why should not the second be entitled to the like honor? Joan of Arc, without doubt, fighting for her country, equalling the most renowned warriors in valour and success, carries nothing ridiculous in it. The Clorindas, the Marphisas, the Bradamantas, the Camillas are not so, and it may be fairly questioned if they ever equalled the shepherdess of Vancouleurs.

The dastardly cruelty, which not being able to conquer, was capable of avenging itself on her courage by condemning her to a barbarous death, might have

have supplied a most affecting episode: I know not if I am mistaken, but it appears to me that the subversion of France, and its re-establishment under the father of Louis the Eleventh, opened a new field to the epopeia, and presented resources which might have interested readers of every nation, and from stronger motives those of that country in particular.

Unhappily, a man void of genius has undertaken this fine subject, and failed in the attempt: it has therefore, after the manner of the French, been hastily considered as impracticable. Because Chapelain has not succeeded, it has been settled that no one else could. Mr. Voltaire himself somewhere treats the idea of considering it seriously as absurd; and so well was he persuaded of this, that, after having dared to cope with Virgil in the serious line, he now proposed imitating the most humorous part of Ariosto, and made choice of this subject as a canvas adapted to receive this light bordering, and, under the title of the Pucelle, given us an exact parody of the Henriade.

This work has had a great run. The youthful part of its readers have been seduced by the licentious pictures with which it abounds, and some voluptuous images which are to be found in it: even connoisseurs themselves have applauded the
5 details

details of fine poetry, which are not uncommon in it. It has thus appeared to unite the suffrages of all; and even its enemies have not had the courage to examine it rigidly. The plan of the work is so licentious, that they have not undertaken to estimate the merit of its execution, or that of the extraneous matter; they have forbore to touch it, as pirates avoid a town that is feeble and defenceless, but in which they know the plague rages. From these considerations alone, the Pucelle might already be ranked much beneath the Orlando.

The pleasantries of Ariosto have, in general, nothing at which modesty can take exception: if some few of his tales pass somewhat beyond the boundaries of simple sport, his language, and the age in which he lived, concur in his extenuation. We admired the exceptionable parts of Rabelais, when the Italians smiled at Joconda.

And this tale, the most licentious of any in Ariosto, is not put into the mouth of the poet. It is a hostess who relates it, who tells it to a lover that has recently experienced a most cruel mortification from his mistress; this pretty story is so well adapted to comfort him, and the author passes on so rapidly to objects with which the nicest delicacy cannot be offended, that

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criticism is disarmed before she has time to be displeased.

The other occasions which might excite severity are rare in the Orlando; whereas in the Pucelle of the eighteenth century, there is scarcely a canto which has any claim to our indulgence. Modesty is incessantly hurt, and that in the grossest degree; even the coloring does not disguise the offensiveness of the design. Scarcely can we excuse the author in having sometimes borrowed the pencil of La Fontaine, and almost throughout used the brush of Aretin.

By this alone then, as I have said, this second poem, did it possess in other respects every perfection of which this species of literature is capable, could not bear a contrast with the Orlando, which is justly ranked amongst the most glorious monuments of Italy. But unfortunately it has not even this merit. The author has evidently set before him Ariosto as a model, and, notwithstanding, he has in no respect followed him, he has produced neither an original nor a copy. His poem is a monstrous assemblage of detached pieces collected together, sometimes indeed dazzling from their agreeable sallies, but which no more constitute a poem than the hundred new novels compose a romance.

The

The Orlando is itself of a nature apparently very extravagant. The Jerusalem, the *Æneid*, the *Iliad*, are grave and heroic from end to end. If in the fifth book of the Latin poem you meet with the adventure of the pilot thrown into the sea by the rage of the captain; if Virgil amuses himself in describing him well soaked, throwing up the salt water he has swallowed, and the Greeks enjoying his disaster and its consequences; it is in a description of Games that this caricature is placed, it occupies but a corner of the picture, which is moreover wholly designed to exhibit a scene of festivity and diversion. The adventure of eating the tables, and the comic verse of little Julius,

Mensas consumere ipfas,

is no pleasantry; it is the ground of a story long before admitted among the antiquities of Rome, since we meet with it again in history, where it is handed down to us in prose.

The *Odyssey* is widely different from the *Iliad*, it is even almost the opposite extreme. Homer has not painted on the same canvas the battles of the gods, and the metamorphoses of the companions of Ulysses; the parting scene of Andromache, and the lowing of the skins of the

oxen

oxen which the companions of Ulysses had eaten a week before.

The Italians were the first who conceived the idea of intermixing in epic poetry tender events, and ridiculous adventures; of passing all at once from the most elevated, to the most playful stile; of giving loose to an imagination to all appearance the most void of order, without wholly losing sight of nature; of exhilarating the mind, without ceasing to move the heart; and who have thus thrown into their compositions all the dignity of tragedy, without excluding from them representations not only taken from common life, but even from such scenes in it as abound with incidents, best adapted to create mirth. And of all the Italians who have written in this stile, none have produced any thing worthy of being compared with the Orlando Furioso. It is the perfection of the burlesque, a species of composition more natural, more respectable, and more difficult to attain than is supposed; apparently cried down in our language, because it has been too much debased, out of which our best authors, with Boileau at their head, have found means to avail themselves in a great degree, while they were cautious of employing it under its ancient name.

There

There are in it certain limits, which must not be left far distant; delicate passages to be seized, light shadings which must not be too much forced. It is the art with which all these regulations are observed, that constitutes the merit of the Orlando. It is that which Mr. Voltaire proposed to imitate, what he seemed, from his cast of mind, more capable of imitating than any other, but which unfortunately he has not imitated in the least in his Pucelle.

The stile of Ariosto is always adapted to what he has to say: in battle it is full of energy, of impetuosity and grandeur; soft, tender, and brilliant in adventures of gallantry, at other times humourous, serious, animated or grave as the subject required: whereas, from the beginning to the end of the Pucelle, but one stile is discoverable. It is a perpetual irony, one continued sneer throughout.

Ariosto is master of his subject, but he makes it his business; even when jesting, he has not the air of making game of his heroes or his readers; and this is what Mr. Voltaire does constantly. The Italian author is correctly attentive to the customs of chivalry, but it is with a view to render it respectable; the French writer conforms to it likewise, but it is to make it ridiculous. The former sometimes indulges

himself

himself in humorous tales or laughable adventures, but it is not to his real heroes that they happen. On the contrary, the latter seeks only to enliven his readers; all is buffoonery and pantomime throughout his poem; the highest and the lowest of his characters equally wear this disgraceful badge. Bonneau is truly comic, and it is one of the best drolls in the poem; but Danois, Charles the Seventh, the Pucelle, should not be so, and they notwithstanding meet with nothing but ridiculous adventures which degrade them.

It is in this more especially, in my opinion, that Mr. Voltaire has mistaken himself. He did not consider that there were two sorts of burlesque; one of which consists in speaking with dignity, and even force, of things in their nature trivial and insignificant; the other in depreciating such as are really great by vulgar expressions or low ideas. The first may please, and please even men of taste and discernment, because there is nothing in it painful or degrading. What is beautiful is still beautiful, in spite of the inverted purpose to which it is in some measure applied. Thus when la Fontaine, in his fable of the Fox and the Goat, says that time, by its continual progress, had eaten into the circular form of the planet with the silver face; this admirable picture

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ture of the moon in its wane is not spoiled, it becomes more pointed when we find it conclude in the goat's mistaking this star for a half-eaten cheese. This too is the burlesque which pleases in the *Lutrin*.

It is not so with the other burlesque, that of Scarron, which descends to apply the habits and manners of the lower vulgar to the most dignified characters, to transform the most majestic portraits into despicable caricatures. Clothe a dwarf in the arms of Achilles, let the pigmy under his burthen affect the deportment of the conqueror of Hector, nothing can be more humorous; but should the son of Peleus, in order to counterfeit Thersites, deliberately assume an artificial hump; should the handsomest of men, by way of affording amusement to the spectator, degrade himself so far as to assume the air and mask of the most deformed, will not every one turn with contempt from such a disgusting masquerade? These are the two species of burlesque.

Ariosto is fully sensible of this; he often indulges himself in gaiety, but he no where disparages his work; there is always cast over his pictures, whatever they are, a delicate varnish, which prevents their tarnishing. Mr. Voltaire, on the other hand, in his *Pucelle*, most plentifully

fully bedaubs his with the coarsest coloring. The first canto too, which is written in a pleasing manner, announces quite a different thing from what follows; the reader has not one pleasure which he does not purchase with pain, not the satisfaction of one moment, for which he does not experience several of indignation and disgust.

Besides in the Orlando, comic and burlesque, as in part it is, we discern a conduct the result of deliberation, a connected plan; I repeat, that in every canto are to be found lessons and models of magnanimity and decency, together with a variety and inexhaustible profusion of characters, exceeding the exuberance of Homer himself in this respect. Marphisa and Bradaminta are both female warriors, the haughtiness of the one serving as a relief to the tender sensibility of the other. Angelica and Fleurs de Lys are both passionate lovers, but how finely is the coquetry of the first depicted! how beautifully is the fidelity of the second portrayed!

Rolando, Renaud, Roger, Brandimard, Rodomont, Mandricard, Ferragus, &c. are all men of valour, but each recognizable by different features of character and different descriptions of courage. Rolando and Renaud love with ardor, and fight with generosity. The soul

of Roger is more tender, his passions less violent, but his heart equally noble. Brandimard is as brave a knight, and as faithful a lover as either, but friendship divides his heart with love, without weakening its power; Mandricard and Rodomont are rash and headstrong, in whom tenderness assumes the same fierce and insulting character as their valor; Ferragus, besides their defects, is a stranger to love, possessing but the mere animal part of it.

Add to this diversity of character, all that the heroism of chivalry has captivating in it, all the charms which a prolific imagination is capable of supplying; whatever emotions the tenderest sensibility can effect, episodes without number, some full of gaiety, as those of Medor and Angelica, of Doralica and Rodomont; others pathetic, like those of Zerbin and Isabella, of Brandimard and Fleur de Lys; and others again fabulous and amusing, as the voyage of Atolphus to the moon: this may serve to give some idea of Ariosto's admirable poem. In what respect does the modern Pucelle resemble it?

Add to this, that in the last work, the satire of Mr. Voltaire is carried to the last degree of licentiousness. The editions published under the inspection of the author, in his old age, contain a new canto, wholly taken up in

abusing his enemies, whom he transforms into galley-slaves, and who being delivered from the oar by their king, testify their gratitude in no other way than by robbing him. This abuse of talent is atrocious. No poet before Mr. Voltaire ever indulged himself in the like ribaldry, and unhappily he has given way to it again, in a manner almost equally scandalous, in his poem of the War of Geneva.

Let us conclude this painful article, which a regard to truth forces from me, and agree, in spite of the commencement of the cantos in the Pucelle, which are most of them admirable; in spite of the charming digressions, which are frequent in this work; and notwithstanding the favorable reception it met with from the public; that the poetical glory of Mr. Voltaire would have suffered no diminution if he had not given this additional proof of his fecundity. It would even have gained much from its suppression, since it indicates rather the limitation, than the extent of his genius.

OF
MR. VOLTAIRE'S
TRAGEDIES.

IT is very remarkable, that the first and the last steps of Mr. Voltaire have been towards the theatre: he finished his literary life with Irene, as he began it with Oedipus. This boisterous and splendid career seemed, indeed, to offer the strongest allurements to a young man fraught with all the enthusiasm of youth, and full of that effervescence which the view of great models inspires in a mind sensible of their excellence: the ardor of production is then as strong in the moral as in the physical system in every man whose organization is happily formed; and in him that this was not a blind or transitory passion, which had mistaken its strength, or the destination of its powers, his success has sufficiently shewn.

It is true, indeed, that in his tragedies we are not to look for those developements of the human heart, so just, so delicate, and so pathetically interesting, which constitute the charm of Racine's pieces; or that force of genius, and profundity of thought, that chain of reasoning, and subtilty of discrimination, if I may be allowed the term, which distinguish those of Corneille; or even the art of dialogue, carried by both those authors to its height of perfection; that is to say, that play of attack and defence, those resources at once natural and unexpected, which enrich the scene, and leave the audience at a loss whether most to admire the propriety or rapidity of the replies.

Alzira, Merope, and Tancred, are fine tragedies. In the duke de Foix, or rather in the part of Lisois, the political principles, the magnanimity, and the heroic delicacy of a gallant knight, who loves, pities, and follows his monarch, without approving his wanderings, are most happily described. Mahomet and Semiramis possess their respective merits; but, in point of invention, have they any thing worthy of being set in competition with the three first acts of the Horatii; with this superstructure raised by the genius of Corneille on a single word found in Livy; with the contrast between a republican youth, whose
heroism

heroism degenerates into barbarity, and a true hero in whom a spirit of patriotism is blended with other virtues, with those propensities naturally dear to all tender minds, with those shadings so skilfully preserved between the conjugal affection of a wife, the violent passion of a mistress, and the tender but masculine regard of a father grown old in the persuasion, that every domestic tie should be sacrificed to the duty we owe our country; to this ingenious and probable error, whence results the false conclusion which forces from the old man, that expression so grand, so simple, and so natural in a Roman, while at the same time so terrible and sublime, "Let him die."

These three first acts appear to me to have reached, perhaps to have exceeded the bounds of human capacity; no theatre, in any age, appears to me to have come near them: Corneille himself after this effort was never able to raise to the like height; but in passages where he does not run into the opposite extreme, he preserves his superiority over Mr. Voltaire, in common with every other dramatic writer.

The resignation of Gusman, in *Alzira*, is doubtless a magnificent representation; it is not without reason those lines are celebrated, wherein it is preserved,

"Of our religions, &c."

But

But is not the pardon granted by Augustus, in Cuma, still more sublime? Gusman in reality does no more than obey the dictates of his religion, perhaps he can hardly be allowed the merit of having fulfilled them: about to expire, it is scarcely possible for him to behave otherwise. Instances are not uncommon of men of harsh and even barbarous dispositions relenting into tenderness on a death-bed: in such moments revenge becomes weak, as it is perceived to be inefficient, and power is disregarded, as it can be no longer enjoyed; besides how great reason has the dying Spaniard to accuse himself of having injured his rival?

But in the case of Augustus, it was while in perfect health; when the lives of his enemies were at his absolute disposal; while the power of vengeance was easy, and the pleasure of enjoying it certain, that he grants a pardon; and to whom? to men stained with ingratitude and treason; to a knot of conspirators, whom the blackest malice and the basest treachery had combined together for his destruction: under such circumstances, it is the freedom of agency, the generosity of the sacrifice, which constitutes its grandeur. Ordinary men admire the sentiments of Gusman; those of Augustus force tears from heroes.

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The like observation will hold good, with regard to the part of Paulina, in Polieuctes : a part unfortunately weakened and even degraded by what surrounds it ; and the more worthy of admiration, as, like the three first acts of the Horatii, it is wholly of the author's own invention, as he could not have gathered a single idea on the subject, either from the ancients or moderns.

Racine himself has none of these flashes of genius : but then how ably is he sustained ; how equal throughout ; what perfection does he not possess, and that in every species ! Burrhus, Agrippina, Achmet, prove sufficiently that had he oftener taken other passions than love for his subject, he would have arrived, though by a different path, to an equal perfection even with Corneille himself, in that particular *forte* for which the latter is distinguished. If the public still persist in the opinion that he was capable of describing tenderness alone, it is one of those errors so common in literature, and which it is impossible to explain or to reform. Accustomed to applaud in him that species of merit of which he has given the most abundant proofs ; and which being of itself sufficient to establish his claim to genius, it became unnecessary to seek other excellencies in him, and it has therefore been tacitly concluded that he had them not.

That alone will no more authorize us in placing Mr. Voltaire on an equal footing with him in this respect, than we have already found him entitled to hold with Corneille in the other. *Zara* is the only piece wherein the latter has attempted to describe the fury of war, and the transports of love. But *Zara* is wholly borrowed: *Orosmanes* is no other than the *Roxana* of *Bajazet*, metamorphosed into a man. A severe critic might possibly urge that the original has lost much of its delicacy by the exchange, without having acquired any additional strength; that the adventitious matter, as being the author's own, is still more weakened, and that in spite of its reputation, this is one of the feeblest of his dramatic works; but if from the circumstance alone, that the principal character is but an imitation, it does not confer on Mr. Voltaire the privilege of ranking as a rival of *Racine*, in those lists wherein the latter has so successfully distinguished himself.

And of this he was fully sensible: this was his sole effort. He did not deceive himself, and the proof that he did not, rests equally in his theatrical as in his other productions; possessed of every imaginable mental resource, he was deficient in that eloquence of the heart, those powers of expression, sometimes soft and at others

others impetuous, at once abundant and chaste, which are necessary to an adequate delineation of the conflicts, the delicacies, and the transports of love; an eloquence, precision, and abundance, which in poetry has been granted among the Romans to Virgil alone, among the Italians to Ariosto and Tasso, in France to the author of *Phædra*, and among other nations to no one.

Mr. Voltaire, like Corneille, has contented himself with making this passion a secondary aid, which serves only to extend his pieces to their proper length. In *Semiramis*, *Mahomet*, and *Cataline*, it has no other office. It is not love by which the spectator feels himself affected in *Tancred*; but the generosity and magnanimity which dazzles throughout the piece. In the *Orphan of China*, the barbarous passion of Gengiskan has none of the characteristics which render love tragical; on the contrary, it borders, as well from its nature as expression, on the opposite description.

Mr. Voltaire, while he justly observed the error of Corneille, who enfeebled his pieces by introducing a passion which, when it does not excite the sole interest, diminishes its force, has nevertheless imitated him. It is a tribute he pays to custom, to convenience, to the constitution, as we may say, of the theatre, whence it is

is not allowable wholly to exclude women; and where it would be often very difficult to find them employment, were they not engaged either in making, or in receiving declarations of love.

Nor are we to expect in Mr. Voltaire's pieces, that conduct, that art of arranging, opening, and thickening a plot, that skill in the management of his scenes, in adding to the embarrassment, and increasing the interest of the piece, of never leaving the stage empty, or occupied by characters brought on for the sole purpose of filling it; an art which was perfectly understood by Racine alone; who does not even possess it himself in all his pieces.

Lastly, We are not to require from Mr. Voltaire that delicacy, purity, and harmony, that noble simplicity, elegant, but not ostentatious, that poetry of sentiment rather than of style, which expresses with equal simplicity and richness, and always in the justest terms, without the restraint of rhyme or measure detracting in the least from the propriety of language, the ragings of love, the fury of ambition, or the subtilties of policy; excellencies, which, in our language, and I believe in every other, were granted to one man alone, and that always the same, to the inimitable Racine, who died at so early a period, so soon torn from his country,

by whom he was very moderately honored in his life time, sordidly repaid by the court for the services he had rendered the language and poetry in general, punished for an honest and praiseworthy action by a disgrace which cost him his life; and lastly, even at the present day, held in light estimation by his own countrymen; who, had he been born in England, Italy, or Germany, would have had statues erected to him in his life, and temples at his death.

The perfection of his language is so great, that half its excellence is lost in representation. His pieces are highly finished and exquisite pictures, which, to discover their full excellence, require to be inspected at leisure and with reflection.

The shades too of his bewitching poetry are so delicate, that it is difficult to find actors capable of conceiving and expressing them. Madam de Sevigné has been harshly reproached for the decree she may be said to have pronounced on the merits of the two authors who divided the theatre in her time; and in the preference she gave to Corneille, by her comparison of Racine to a modish taste, to coffee, which as she said would not maintain its ground.

Madam de Sevigné, even in this error, seems to me to have given a proof of her judgment. She expressed very happily the sentiments which
a dissipated

a dissipated woman, who had lived a good deal in the world, and whose opinion of dramatic productions arose rather from representation than reading, was likely to form; one who was determined in her choice by the emotion she felt at the former, and who carried with her into the closet the impressions she felt at the theatre. Doubtless the terrible graces of Corneille, the Michael Angelo of poetry, must affect both her and all of her age, in a more lively degree, than the soft, easy, and natural, though learned tints of Racine, who may be deemed the Raphael of that art. There is scarcely any company by which the characters of the Horatii, Cinna, Polieuctes, &c. are not tolerably performed. But where are we to find actors who are capable of declaiming, without monotony, Hippolitus's declaration of love, the tender remonstrances of Iphigene in the part of Phædra, to vary the tones as the different passions require, in that of Roxana, to hit the precise degree, sometimes of confidence, at others of rage; sometimes of the pathetic, and at others of rancour, which are necessary to it; to reconcile in the character of Achilles the anger of the son of Peleus, with the dignity and grandeur which Racine has preserved to him amidst his transports. He himself instructed the celebrated Champ-mellé. The manner in which she played his characters

characters made her pass for the best actress of her age. It was thought she added to the beauties of her author; but on the contrary, all her merit consisted in availing herself of his instructions, that she might not lose any of them. Accordingly Mad. Sevigné again says, that to discern the beauties of the tragedy of Bajazet, we ought to see the actress. She formed her judgment in this also like a sensible woman, who read little, but judged well of what she saw. Her only fault was that of forming too hasty a decision; of not allowing herself time to examine whether she would not have found in reading Bajazet what she had so much admired in the representation; and had she done so, she would have found much more. But she had not the necessary leisure to be correct; and in more serious affairs, there are so few men who take this necessary time, that in a point of literature we may well excuse the want of it in a woman.

However this may be, it does not appear that Mr. Voltaire in this respect can be considered as possessing any superior merit to distinguish him from his predecessors: though infinitely superior to Corneille, not in some particular passages, wherein Corneille has not even an equal; but in his general taste, in point of correctness and elegance of style; much is still wanting in

all these particulars, before he will be thought to excel, or even to equal Racine.

The proper word is never wanting in Racine. In Mr. Voltaire's poetry it is seldom found. We discover even that he has not been at the pains to seek it. Thus in the Death of Cæsar we find,

"Cæsar was a hero, but Cæsar was a *traitor*."

Traître most assuredly is only placed there, because the verse that precedes it ends in *maitre*. The proper word would have been tyrant, or usurper, &c. never was the brave, the generous Cæsar accused of treason or perfidy.

We find the same word equally misapplied in Merope. Polifontes says of Egistus,

"It is your son, madam, or 'tis a *traitor*."

He should have said an impostor. Egistus, in giving himself even falsely for the Queen's son, is an impostor, and not a traitor.

We read in Semiramis,

"And unpropitious heaven
Hath *corrupted* the course of his prosperity."

Is *corrupted* the proper word? Racine says of Athalia,

"Of late a spectre most importunate
Hath interrupted the course of my prosperity."

In

In *Cædipus*, *Philoctetes*, speaking of *Hercules*,
says,

“ From waiting at the altars
And raising tombs to that great hero,
I come ————— ”

Why tombs? Altars may be raised in honor of a deity, because many in reality may be consecrated to him. But the same man can have but one tomb.

In *Zara*, *Lusignan*, in order to express the resurrection of *Jesus Christ*, and describe the holy sepulchre, says :

“ Behold the spot, whence he drew life
From out the silent grave.”

Would *Racine* have expressed himself thus? Is life to be found in the grave? The author of *Andromache* finely says,

“ Thou seek’st her with thine eyes;
Thou speak’st to her with thine heart.”

He has said,

“ Full plainly hast thou heard those sighs
Which fear’d to be repell’d.”

But what a difference between them, between these sighs, which animate and personify every thing; which excite no other surprise in the reader, than that which such energy of thought united with such ease must necessarily produce, and the languid turn of the *King of Cyprus*!

In *Tancred*, *Orbassan* says to *Argira*:

“ The tie which now unites us once again
Had ne’er ta’en place, but that in angry strife,
Now buried in oblivion, my fond heart
Which hated, still esteem’d you.”

Hated, perhaps, is the proper word, but what a shocking harshness!

Racine allowed himself to say,

“ Did you e’en hate me, I could not complain.”

There is no ear but must perceive, that in the last verse, the word has all the softness it is capable of, and that in the other instance, its natural harshness is greatly augmented.

Instances of this kind are innumerable.

In point of elegance, *Mr. Voltaire* is still less qualified to maintain the comparison. It is true he has nearly approached *Racine* in several passages of *Mariamne*, *Brutus*, *Semiramis*, and *Tancred*, and above all in the part of *Lisoi*s Duke de *Foix*, a part written with a continuation of grandeur, precision, force, and simplicity, which is truly remarkable. But in general, he has rarely piqued himself on devoting the necessary labour, to insure to his poetical works, and more especially to his tragedies, this species of merit.

Let the two poets be closely compared, particularly where they have the same things to say,

say; for instance, in the reflections of Zara and Eriphiles, on their mutual ignorance of their origin.

The daughter of Lusignan thus expresses herself,

“ ——— Ha! What say’st thou? Why
Would’st thou recal my sorrows, Fatima,
Alas, I know not who or what I am,
Not e’en who gave me birth.”

Hear the rival of Iphigene:

“ Expos’d for ever to some new distress,
In earliest youth to strangers’ care entrusted;
E’en from my birth till now, I’ve liv’d
Unconscious of a tender mother’s smile,
Or father’s kind regard.”

The former verses are not even tolerable prose, the others are poetical, elegant, and abounding with pathetic imagery.

Gengiskan and Hippolitus have each to express a barbarous love; both are equally at a loss how to express a passion with which they are alike unacquainted; but the Tartar has not one expression which goes to the heart, or comes from it, not one that is poetical or affecting, it is a gross passion, grossly and prosaically expressed:

“ Beware how thou insult’st excess of weakness,
Which rage already turns to my reproach;
E’en this avowal may create you danger;
Dread then my love, and tremble at my favors,

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My soul is but too eager for revenge;
 And I shall punish you for having lov'd you.
 Oh pardon me—E'en now amidst my threats I sigh;
 Quell then this rage, beginning to subside,
 And by a single word decide my empire's fate;
 But this important word you must pronounce.
 Say then, without delay, reserve, or art,
 If you will have my hatred or my love."

What a cold declamation, when contrasted with that well known passage of Phædra, so often quoted, and so continually new to every reader possessed of taste and sentiment.

" Behold before you an unhappy prince,
 A striking monument of frantic pride;
 Who long a rebel to all pow'rful love,
 Have oft insulted his poor captive's chains;
 Pitying the fate of those whose wrecks I saw,
 I deem'd myself secure: and from the shore
 Thought to behold unhurt the storm around me,
 Now made subservient to the common lot.
 What wond'rous pow'r transports me from myself,
 Which in a moment humbles my rash pride,
 And proves this haughty soul is now enslaved.
 In all the agonies of grief and shame,
 For six long months I've borne the fatal dart
 By which I'm pierc'd: against myself and you
 I vent my fruitless vows. I fly you, present,
 Absent, your lov'd, adored image haunts me—
 I trace it in the forest's gloom, the day's bright beam,
 The shade of night; each object I behold
 Reflects those charms, I strive in vain to fly from;
 And serves alike, spite of myself, to give you up

The

The rebel slave Hippolytus. E'en now
In vain I strive to seek my former self;
My bow, my car, my jav'lin uselefs lie;
Great Neptune's lessons are forgotten;
My steeds no longer hear their master's voice,
While every grove re-echoes with my groans.
A conquest so unworthy makes you blush—
How fierce the heart your beauty has subdued!
How strange a captive in so sweet a toil!
The offer therefore should the more be priz'd;
I speak a language I am little vers'd in;
Let not my vows be deem'd the less sincere,
Because perhaps they're ill express'd; vows which
Hippolytus could form for you alone."

Doubtless Gengiskan, at a mature age, possessed of uncontrouled power and enraged, in addressing a woman whom he wishes to force from her husband, ought not to use the same submissive language, the like soft and insinuating eloquence in which the young and susceptible Hippolytus addresses his mistress, young, susceptible, and independent like himself; but he ought equally to aim at enlivening what he has to say by imagery; he should equally endeavour to unite energy with elegance, and to avoid those turns of expression defective in themselves, and contrary to the spirit of the language; such as,

"I shall punish you, for having lov'd you."

Or weak ones, such as,

"E'en this avowal."

Or idle and embarrassed, as,

—————"excess of weakness,
Which rage already turns to my reproach."

Is an example equally striking, of the astonishing superiority of Racine still wanting? Let us attend to the sentiments of Gengiskan and Achmet on the same subject, that of tenderness and policy; who concur in preferring ambition and their personal security, to the delights which successful love is capable of conferring. Behold Achmet,

" ————And dost thou wish me at my years
To serve a vile apprenticeship to love?
And that a heart which toil and age have harden'd,
Should follow pleasure's vain, imprudent dictates?
Far other charms are those by which I'm caught:
I love in her the blood from which she's sprung;
To her united, and to Bajazet,
He sees me raise a barrier 'gainst himself;
A Vizier ever must alarm his Sultan.
No sooner nam'd, than dreaded and suspected;
Lur'd by the plenteous spoil of his destruction,
And prompted by capricious cruelty,
His master seldom lets him see old age.
Bajazet now much loves and honors me,
His daily perils serve to wake regard;
Once firmly seated on the throne, perhaps,
He'll view in me a useless friend or slave;
Should this be so, and he demand my head,
Regardless of my loyalty or love,
Osmin, I will not say—but I presume
It may be long ere his command's obey'd.

I'll serve the Emp'ror with fidelity,
But leave to vulgar minds to worship tyrants—
The mad extravagance to bless the arm
That's rais'd to shed my blood is not for me."

What says Gengiskan?

" Since here my soul first own'd a conqu'ror,
Since first my haughty spirit was subdued,
My heart e'er since retain'd its former freedom,
Safe from the power of degrading love.
Idamia, I confess, rais'd in my restless mind
Emotions strange, and pangs till then unknown.
Our northern caves and barren plains, produce
No beauty that can fascinate the senses;
The fierce companions of our hardy labors,
Partake our spoils and emulate our courage:
In these mild climes, from soft Idamia's eyes,
From her whose ev'ry word and gesture charms,
I drank a new and subtle poison.—
Thanks to the cruelty that rais'd my anger,
Contempt dispell'd this dang'rous charm;
The sov'reign, but mysterious passion of the soul,
My happiness, had caus'd my utter ruin.
Freed by her coldness, I pursu'd my bold
Career, and purchas'd boundless victory
For weak, unmanly sighs. Th' unworthy flame
With which I burnt, no more shall fire my heart;
Without a pang I banish the base thought,
Woman shall ne'er possess such influence o'er me;
I will forget her, and at leisure leave her
To feel my scorn, and curse her rebel pride.
Ostar, I charge you, name her not."

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The object of all these quotations, is by no means to detract from the merit of Mr. Voltaire, but merely to evince the superiority of Racine over him, in that species of merit which has hitherto come under our consideration.

What characterises the former, what is in an especial manner a merit of his own, what, in my opinion, entitles him to the claim of originality as an author, as the founder of a new drama, and the creator of an original manner, is the variety, the multiplicity of portraits, with which his pieces abound. On this head, he has the advantage over both Racine and Corneille.

The idea conceived of the variety of the latter is perhaps no more founded in justice, than the reproach of sameness repeated against the former. It is in reality Corneille who may be justly accused of too much uniformity.—In his pieces the names alone are varied; the characters and passions are the same: the sentiments are alike in all. Haughtiness, pretended Roman magnanimity, sometimes swelled to a gigantic size, are constantly the prevailing features, a desire of revenge, oftentimes atrocious, and frequently expressed with an inconceivable mixture of turgidness and familiarity. Of six or seven pieces which are in representation, this is the ground of four; the *Cid*, *Cinna*, *Rodogune*, and the *Death*

Death of Pompey. Chimena, Emilia, Cornelia, all demand the punishment of a father, or a husband, and the abominable Cleopatra, in Rodogune, enumerates revenge among her pretexts for the horrors she meditates.

Racine would probably have diversified his Theatre much more, had he not renounced the exercise of his genius when it had attained its full vigor. Britannicus, Iphigenia, Bajazet, Phædra, Athalia, have no common similitude to each other, but this great man becoming indolent at too early a period, has done so little, that, if we may so express it, he seems barren in the midst of fecundity. He has delineated but few passions, because he has written but few pieces; and if he had not produced Bajazet and Athalia, it would probably have been said, that he was incapable of succeeding, but in subjects on which he borrowed his ideas from the ancients.

Mr. Voltaire chalked out for himself a wider circle. He has, as we may say, brought mankind at large upon his theatre. He has, under various forms, introduced on it every interest and passion which actuate the human heart. To these he has added sometimes striking descriptions of foreign manners, and obsolete customs; at others, under national names, he has alluded no less happily to our own habits; a
species

species of writing which he may even be accused of not having carried so far as he might have done, and which has degenerated in the hands of his feeble imitators.

In *Alzira*, the customs of America are opposed to those of Europe; in the *Orphan of China*, the virtues of a civilized people are contrasted with the violences of a barbarous one: in *Tancred* is displayed all the pomp, the grandeur, and sublime magnanimity of chivalry, such at least as it is described in romances: maternal tenderness shines in *Merope*: the foundation of Mahometanism is portrayed in *Mahomet*, with vigor, if not with fidelity: the intrigues of courts, the hidden crimes, and secret remorse, which poison and degrade external pomp, are exposed to view in *Semiramis*. Even in those pieces of which the general character is less perfect, there are, notwithstanding, some characters of great excellence to be found, and all of a different description of beauty; such is that which I have before remarked, of *Lisoi*, in the *Duke de Foix*; of *Electra*, in *Orestes*; *Cicero*, in *Rome Preserved*; of *Fulvia*, in the *Triumvirate*, and of *Athamara*, in the *Scythians*, &c.

This abundance, enriched by variety, is doubtless a valuable excellence, but in my opinion,

Mr.

Mr. Voltaire possesses two others, still more precious and estimable, which are no less exclusively his own, and for one of which I have not perceived that any one has hitherto given him credit.

The first consists in that philosophy, at the same time dignified and pathetic, with which his good pieces abound. The other is that of not having admitted into them any villainous, base, or absolutely detestable character; of not having racked his imagination to conceive, and to find language and employment for such characters as Narcissus, Mathan, and still less for a Cleopatra, Rodogune, Maximin, Felix, and others of this description, ostentatiously displayed by one of his rivals, sometimes escaping the other, and multiplied to the most scandalous degree on the modern stage, which thence assumes rather the appearance of a field devoted to villainy, than a school of virtue.

This is a point on which I presume to think almost all our authors have been mistaken, who have displayed their talents in this species of composition. It is necessary, say they, to avail ourselves of the feelings of the audience; but at the same time they have forgotten that there should be a proportion between the shock, and the organs which are to sustain it.

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In common life, in spite of our invincible propensity to interest ourselves in favor of every being who seems to suffer, if his cries are continual, if they degenerate into screams, if his wounds are hideous and openly displayed, we are presently impressed with horror, rather than pity. We fly from a spectacle which operates as a punishment, and become indifferent from excess of sensibility: it is the string of the violin which loses its sweetness from being too much stretched.

This principle is universally true, equally on the theatre as elsewhere. There the organs should not be wounded, from a too great desire of affecting them; which must happen, even in comedy, when the humour is too gross, or the vices too odious; and in tragedy, when the misfortunes, and for a stronger reason, when the guilt of the heroes is extended to a degree of atrociousness.

Has not Moliere somewhat violated this fitness in his *Tartuffe*? This piece possesses some most excellent strokes of humor, and some masterly traits of character: but the outlines of the picture appear to me neither just nor pleasing: his impostor is at the same time too base, too knavish, and too gross; the real *Tartuffes* would be much less to be dreaded, if they were not more skilful:

skilful: those among them who are capable of equal guilt, use very different means to conceal it.

Further, an abuse of religion, pushed to such an excess, becomes more properly an object of justice than comedy. We do not laugh at a scene of horror; and the character of the Tartuffe is so criminal, that the poet had no way left of disposing of him but by sending him to prison, by an immediate and irregular act of power, by a *lettre de cachet*, which assuredly is neither instructive nor humorous.

The rule is the same, and even still more essential to tragedy. Its object is to impress and affect the heart: true, but in order that the tears may be gentle, it must be gentle sensations that produce them, not painful ones, which force them from us.

Even in catastrophes, which the audience has foreseen, those which they appear to have sought, but, in order to partake as it were, in the horror attending them, such as public executions, (these, as we know, are tragedies of the vulgar) in those scenes of terror to which the spectators are attracted by the hope and the expectation of being affected, the sentiment must proceed from one of these two sources; either the guilt is of such a nature as absolutely to extinguish all compassion, in which case the sufferings of the victims

excite no pity, or their remorse, when compared with their crimes, obtain their pardon; the audience then becomes interested in their fate, and every spectator awaits the fatal moment with painful anxiety.

Both reason and experience then seem to concur, in admonishing the poet not to carry theatrical emotion to that excess by which it becomes annihilated, or changed into fixed grief; which, I repeat, can never fail to happen, when the characters are too criminal, or too unfortunate.

But how happens it, that a principle thus evident should have been unknown, even to the most celebrated adepts at that epocha, when the art received its greatest perfection? Whence is it, that in spite of the concurring reflections of the greatest geniuses, in a long series of ages, the axiom has prevailed, that the object of tragedy should be to give a rude shock to the passions, and not to make the feelings of an audience gently vibrate? How happens it, as a consequence, that while nature and good sense direct us to remove from the scene whatever has a tendency to wound the heart, with at least as much care as we do that which may offend the eye or the ear, the stage has been crouded with hideous spectacles, which would make an audience of executioners shudder? How comes it that they have been not
only

only attempted, but applauded? The solution of this strange problem will perhaps be easily found, by recurring to the infancy of our drama, and tracing its origin and progress. Although this digression may become somewhat long, I hope I shall be excused in making it. It is not foreign to an Art which engaged the attention of him who is the subject of this work for near a century, and it may contribute to introduce a reformation which to me seems really important, as far as a reformation of this nature can be.

It is to Greece we are indebted for the drama, in common with all the other arts. In architecture, sculpture, poetry, and eloquence, this ingenious people soon emerged from barbarism. The theatre alone retained among them in its maturity, the same character it had in its origin, and unhappily for us, this was a monstrous one.

Whatever might have been the unknown cause, which directed the taste of the inventors of the dramatic art, and thence formed that of the audience, certain it is, that they appear to have adopted from choice, the most horrible subjects: crimes often as difficult to be conceived, as committed; and what is very strange, perpetrated often by virtuous persons, whose guilt is rather to be attributed to the rigour of their fate, than to the depravity of their principles. Such,

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for instance, are those of Orestes, Phædra¹, and above all Œdipus. Œdipus the most scandalous of all subjects, which conveys no instruction, except, that with the most spotless minds, men are often doomed to perpetrate the most horrid guilt, and that by the eternal decrees of Providence, the punishment due only to atrocious villainy, sometimes falls on the head of the virtuous and innocent: a terrible and desponding moral, impious in its tendency, and from which it is impossible that any one good effect should result.

Œdipus, a good husband, a good father, and a good king, excites indignation and murmur, rather than pity, when we see him not only involuntarily become guilty of parricide and incest, but punished with rigour by the gods, for those offences which themselves have caused him to commit, and to which he was no way conscious.

Doubtless, from daily observation, a reflecting man may be held excused, in admitting a predestination, a supernatural power, which, in spite of ourselves, disposes the events on which our fate depends. It is but too evident that there are some persons born under the influence of a

¹ Phædra is virtuous, since the immediate interference of the Divinity was necessary to corrupt her. Orestes has even received orders from the Gods to avenge his father.

malignant

malignant fortune, which they cannot elude, while others appear to inherit from nature a propensity to evil which they are unable to resist. The former, notwithstanding the integrity of their principles, are all their life the sport of, and often fall victims to, the rigors of society; detraction even follows them to the grave, and after death forbids them the reparation due to suffering virtue. The latter, seem in an especial manner devoted to villainy from their organization, and the satisfaction with which they commit it, and these again do not always meet with the punishment they deserve—but can more be granted to fate?

At least in this system which considers the Deity as a capricious and fantastic workman, guided, in the distribution of human propensities, and the destiny of mankind, by mere whim; the honest man, abandoned to persecution, retains his sentiments of virtue and innocence to console him under his misfortunes; and a *Cartouche* impelled to perverse actions, has received, together with the vocation to evil, that disposition which causes him to love it: the one is unhappy, but irreproachable: the other contributes, at least in a secondary degree, to those crimes with which he is stained: Providence has destined him to live and die a villain; be it so: but with the lot of a villain he has apportioned him the mind of one—and this system again is very severe.

But the history of *Œdipus* supposes one still more terrible: this Prince abhors vice, and must notwithstanding commit it: his mind is unspotted, while his hand is embrued in blood! And, after committing crimes to which he has not consented, he is punished by the Deity, because he has yielded, not to an impulse of depravity, but to an irresistible fate, originally allotted to him: once again, this system inspires one with horror. Such a dispensation makes of the Divinity a monster, a hundred times more wicked than those frail beings whom he dooms to wretchedness with such wanton cruelty.

Is it not enough that Providence should have given men that terrible power of treating innocence like guilt? At least, our religion absolves it of injustice, by considering this world as a state of passage, as a season of trial, the defects of which have no influence on futurity. It places beyond life an Almighty Revisor, a Judge of Judges, who reverses these dreadful decrees; a Judge, who in his turn punishes the authors of injustice, and delivers the victims of it. But the Greeks had not this resource. They did not place *Œdipus* in the Elysian fields. He, notwithstanding his integrity, was not only guilty, but punished, for crimes which the Gods had ordained him to commit: he seems to have existed, but to afford
a terrible

a terrible monument of their despotism and injustice.

I repeat it, were this horrid system a true one, is it one of those which a reflecting government should endeavour to render common, and proclaim with a loud voice on the stage?

With this strange system of metaphysics, the Greeks united manners which even the difference of times and taste cannot excuse. In Sophocles, Orestes stabs his mother in cool blood: we hear her wretched screams, and her daughter Electra, who is alone on the stage, applauds the parricide, and encourages her brother in the perpetration of it.

In Alcestes also, which with so absurd a plot, possesses such pathetic details, Admetes loads his aged father with revilings, in him more criminal than all the enormities of Œdipus, because they are the result of will and of reflection: the subject of his anger, is the refusal which the good old man pleasantly makes of dying for him. I know not if in literature a greater absurdity was ever hazarded, than the reasoning of P. Brumoy, in justification of this shocking indecency. "It offends us only," says he, "from the alteration which has taken place in our manners: the Greeks would have been equally hurt at those, since established in other countries." In sup-

port of this, the learned Jesuit cites the fury of single combat, so long retained in Europe, and the custom of the Iroquois, who put their fathers to death when they become old : but this comparison itself condemns the Grecian manners : Can it be deemed a justification of them, to compare them with such as authorize assassinations and parricides ?

Besides, a father murdered by his son, or a son murdered by his father, has been presented on no stage. When duels have been hazarded, as in the *Cid*, what is blameworthy or offensive in the action, is compensated for by the grandeur which accompanies it, or by the beauties which it produces ; but what is the result of the tragical farces on which we are now treating, and what would it be if we had all the tragedies as prodigiously multiplied on the Athenian theatre as on our own !

Do not these manners prove, that if the Greeks, as inventors, were worthy of being looked up to as guides by those who were willing to tread in their footsteps, that they were not equally entitled in all respects to be regarded as models for imitation ? From them were to be acquired the principles of the art which should have been applied to wiser and more noble ends. The first sculptors used only wood and stone : but the Olympian
Jupiter,

Jupiter, and Athenian Minerva, were carved in ivory and gold. Phidias, who brought the art to its perfection, made choice of materials worthy of his skill.

This reformation, the Romans, who were the imitators, and even copyists of the Greeks, in almost every liberal art, failed of making: at least we may presume so, from the declamations of Seneca which we have, and the idea preserved to us of what the tragedies of Ovid and Varus were, which we have not. The misfortunes of the empire which followed, the ravages of the barbarians, and lastly, in the latter ages, the quarrels between the altar and throne, stifled the dramatic, in common with every other art. The people oppressed with their own misfortunes, but too well realized; had little inducement to repair together to mourn over fictitious woes. Had any poet attempted to draw tears by depicting some striking catastrophe, there was then hardly any family but could have furnished him with a subject.

The modern Italians in the 16th century, cultivated epic poetry with success, which had degenerated since the time of Virgil, but they made but vain and feeble efforts to awaken the tragic muse. Italy was then overrun with wandering Greeks, who, in order to gain a subsistence,

sistence, highly extolled the ancient models of their country: they printed Sophocles, Euripides, &c. they restored them, commented, and translated them, but they taught no one the art of imitating them. Their ancestors were unable to do it when they governed the world by their arms: their descendants did not even conceive an idea of it, when they ruled it only by opinion.

The Spaniards, who were long unknown to the Greeks, and still longer the slaves of the Romans, had opened to themselves an interesting field. This strange Melpomene was as new in her nature as that of the Greeks in the days of Thespis, and was totally independent of her, except in the singular disparity of uniting Gracioso's buffoons with despairing lovers; of introducing on the same scene a Jodelet and an Achilles.

Ordinary subjects, usually taken from common life, but with complicated intrigues, fantastic incidents, mistakes, favored by the use of veils, or (*mantas*,) in the women, and cloaks, or (*capas*,) in the men; no crimes, no violences, except such as a false spirit of bravery and of domestic delicacy could give rise to, a mixture of despotism and gallantry towards the fair sex; which made the men the slaves of their mistresses, and

and the tyrants of their sisters; amours crossed, but always happy in the end: in short, astonishing sallies of genius, amidst a barbarism no less striking: such are the characteristics of the dramas of the Lopez de Vaga, the Calderonas, the Moretos, &c. too little known, and too much despised, but more comic, and a hundred times more worthy of admiration than is imagined ².

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² About twenty years ago, on my return from Spain, familiarized with the language, and retaining a lively impression of what I had seen, I ventured to translate some of their pieces. But I must own, the copies conveyed a very inadequate idea of their originals. I was at that time under the influence of certain principles which some modern translators have endeavoured to establish; such, for instance, as that it is the duty of a translator to accommodate his version to the taste of his reader, and to amend the text where it is deficient in this respect.

It is owing to the prevalence of this and such like maxims, that the translations of the English theatre, and of other literary works, are rendered very useless performances, because they are faithless ones. My Spanish drama is in a similar predicament. It may serve to afford some idea of the artifice and conduct of the pieces, of the disposition and even the taste of their scenes; but none of the style of their authors, and the nature of their dramatic poetry. I have frenchified, and consequently spoiled it, in which I was much to blame. More mature reflection has since led me to concur with Mr. Voltaire in the opinion, notwithstanding what

At the revival, or more properly at the birth of letters in France, in the beginning of the 17th century, for the reign of Francis the 1st. introduced there but a masquerade of bacchanals, disguised as muses; at this epocha, the honor of which is ascribed to Cardinal Richlieu, who, to mention it by the bye, in no way contributed to it, our first authors, without any reserve, made the Spanish drama their model: they made it the common and only source whence they drew all their subjects.

Some singular circumstances had caused that language and literature to become prevalent in France: the courtiers who surrounded the throne,

what may be urged to the contrary, that a translation, in order to be instructive and useful, should be literal.

But, owing to the difference of taste and idiom, it will be ridiculous! Well, it will serve to render the contrast still more striking! In order to bring the Europeans acquainted with the dress and conversation of the Turks, Indians, or Chinese, would it be an apt expedient to muffle them in our short frocks, assign them our viands and liquors, and make them express themselves in the polished periods of Racine or Addison?

But no body will read translations thus literally rendered! Be it so: in that case none will imagine they know the original, but those capable of reading the text; there will be no more translations, or at least there will be no more false conclusions drawn from translations: and this must certainly be deemed a benefit to literature.

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the *petits maitres* in private circles, were Spaniards: as were the heroes both of the dramas and of romance. Corneille, the great Corneille, himself began, by assuming the Spanish cape and the Golila.

But the scholar soon left his tutors behind him. Having given the Cid after their manner, by the force of his own genius, he produced the *Horatii*; a piece, by which, as I before observed, he placed a barrier between himself and other dramatic writers, which no one has yet been able to surmount; a piece in which there is nothing but what is really noble; where the guilt which attends the affassination of Camilla, a fact justified moreover by history, does not degrade the murderer; nor the weakness of the two last acts derogate from decency, or good manners; where the father of the guilty party, become his advocate, is less solicitous to justify him, than to obtain his pardon in favor of the triumph which preceded the crime. Had Corneille continued to labour in the same road, he would in every sense have been the creator of a new theatre, and the reformer of the old.

Hitherto he owed nothing to the Greeks; he had borrowed nothing from them; perhaps they were wholly unknown to him: but at this period, whether he had lately thought proper to read them,

them, and imagined he ought to follow examples, he who had so lately afforded an inimitable one himself, or whether, (which is more probable) he felt oppressed and disconcerted by the pedantry of the times, which became the resource of such of his rivals, to whom genius was wanting; a pedantry of which he was the victim, from the whole phalanx of criticism being united together against him, from hearing Aristotle spoken of, the $\Phi\beta\beta\alpha$, $\kappa\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\alpha$, ill explained, and still worse understood, he conceived that in future he ought to treat his subjects after the Grecian mode; to place on the scene vile or furious characters, and accompany sentiments capable of dignifying human nature, with puerilities or horrors calculated only to degrade it; he produced Cinna, Polieuctes, Rodogune, &c. Dramas looked on as *chefs d'œuvres*, and in reality sparkling with admirable beauties.

But he made Emilia a direct fury, who joins perverseness to ingratitude; who openly declares that “Favors flowing from a hated hand operate as injuries; and notwithstanding, does not hesitate to accept them, in order to employ them in seducing the friends of her abused benefactor, who heaps them on her; who declares in express terms, that she would marry Augustus, to have the

the pleasure of murdering him in his bed ³, &c. He makes Cinna a base and deliberate villain, who having from weakness conspired against his prince, his protector, and his friend, under the pretext that he has usurped the empire of Rome; and observing him about to make a voluntary resignation of it, presses him on his knees to retain it in his possession, that he may never want an excuse to assassinate him; and of this policy he makes no scruple openly to boast.

He makes of Felix, in Polieuctes, the basest and most worthless villain that ever existed, an old father, who having married his daughter to a worthy but indigent country gentleman, some years afterwards, on the return of one of her former lovers, who had acquired a fortune, deliberates aloud with himself on the expediency of cutting his son-in-law's throat, by which he (the father-in-law) must become a gainer.

“ If by his death the other were to marry my daughter,
“ I should gain in him a powerful protector, who would
“ raise me a hundred degrees higher than I am.”

But above all, the character of Rodogune may be regarded as constituting the infamy of the author, and the success of it that of

³ “ I would accept Livia's place of him,
“ As a more certain means to compass his destruction.”

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the theatre ; it is an assemblage of villainies, each more abominable than the rest, at once destitute of cause, connections, interest, or probability. Horror itself degenerates into ridicule, because the wickedness of one of the two personages becomes the parody of the other : it is a mother, who while avowing, with extravagant refinements, to her sons, that she has with her own hand murdered their father, her husband ; tells them, that in order to be declared king by her, they must, like her, commit parricide, and bring her the head of a princess with whom she knows them to be passionately enamoured : a conduct in her no less ridiculous than horrible ⁴. This is the serious piece, and here follows the parody.

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⁴ The idea of proposing to the lovers of *Rodogune* to put her to death by their hands, is absurd ; because *Cleopatra* cannot seriously imagine that they will accede to her proposal ; because it is totally unnecessary ; and because it is imprudent. The old *Megara* has a thousand other means to rid herself of the princess she fears ; and from the moment that she has disclosed to her sons this extravagant bargain, she must expect that if they are not the ministers of her vengeance, they will take measures to defeat it.

Mr. *Voltaire* has made these remarks in his commentary on *Corneille*, and though he wanted confidence not to praise the piece, he is, notwithstanding, charged with having malignantly

The young princess informed of the proposition made to her lovers, promises in return to bestow her hand on him who will bring her the head of his mother. I know not what apologist of Corneille pretends to justify this passage; because, says he, the bargain of Rodogune is a mere finesse; she knows very well that they will not take her at her word. It is in that very particular that it is the more abominable; and that I can neither conceive how Corneille could give birth to such a monster, nor how the public could applaud it.

Even that celebrated scene in the 5th act, is like the rest of the piece, but a series of puerility as well as horror. The assassination of the youthful and vigorous Seleucus, in a little walk of the garden, by the hand of an aged mother, his death, which happens just on the pronunciation of the word, "It is ——" which prevents his revealing the name of his murderers; the uncertainty of the good man Antiochus, divided

malignantly sought occasions for censure, and industriously laboured to lessen the tribute of applause.

One observation ought to have its place here, which is, that Rodogune, the most horrible and disgusting piece, except Atrea, on the theatre, is likewise one of the worst written, and most deficient in plot and in conduct; so much was the genius of the author cramped, in being sacrificed to this abominable species of writing.

between

between his young mistress and the antique fury who has already boasted to herself of the parricide she has committed; that swelling chest, and at last the horrid purpose of Megara, reduced to the necessity of poisoning herself; her blasphemies still more ridiculous than useless, all this is beneath even the most barbarous æra of the theatre.

If the name of Corneille and the bustle of representation did not influence us; if at the present day we dared to estimate according to its real merit what our ancestors admired; and what even we ourselves have been long taught to esteem from tradition; if we did not endeavour to cast an illusion before us, by voluntarily disguising what we feel at this horrible spectacle; in mistaking for an emotion occasioned by the grandeur and beauty of composition, that which results from the stage trick of actors, the change of scenery, and even the astonishment into which we are thrown by a collection of such absurdities; *Rodogune* would be consigned to the like oblivion as *Theodore*, *Surena*, *Pertharites*, and so many other pieces, the fruit of the most unequal genius perhaps, ever produced by nature: a man to whom it was allotted never to be moderately good, or bad; and who
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in the one is as much above his competitors, as he is beneath them in the other.

The decent, tender, and delicate Racine, uniting a superiority of taste with an equal share of expression and sentiment, took proper care not to stain his drama in like manner, by making of his principal personages, of those through whom he wished to excite the pity or admiration of his audience, such characters as *Brinvilliers*, or *Guilleris*, whom even ordinary justice must devote to the wheel or the stake.

A deference for the Greeks, and the prejudice of the age in which he lived, induced him to undertake Phædra; but he called forth all the powers of his genius to soften and modify this subject: perhaps he was to blame in having undertaken it: but it was impossible to palliate it with more art. He throws on the confidante the more odious part of the calumny which produces the catastrophe: he made it a species of virtue in CEnone, and was equally attentive to punish her for it.

If, in compliance with historical fact, he was obliged to describe Aggripina, the mother of Nero, both in conduct and expression, as a woman void of principle; of putting into her mouth the same avowal as the Cleopatra of Rodogune, that of an attempt on her husband's life; with what

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delicacy

delicacy does he pass over the painful and necessary passage :

“ He died—a thousand rumors spread to my disgrace,
 “ I check’d the early news of his decease, &c.”

We find in his pieces but two unpleasant characters of his own invention ; two villains disagreeable to behold, Narcissus and Mathan ; but these, in the first place, are subaltern characters, and in the next, the author has taken due care to compose the spectators by more consoling contrasts ; the generous Burrhus appears the more noble, near the associate of Locusta : the indulgent magnanimity of the warlike Abner becomes the more striking, when opposed to the dastardly cruelty of the high priest. If the latter is base enough to say, what so many courtiers think :

“ What matters it, ignoble blood to spill ?
 “ Let us not load our king with useless cares,
 “ To be by him suspected, stands instead of guilt.”

The general of the army exclaims with horror,

“ Oh Mathan ! is that fit language for a priest ?”

Whereas, in Corneille, the wildest and most atrocious sentiments, have nothing to counter-balance them ; the base and vindictive rage of Emilia, Cinna, Cleopatra, and Rodogune, has no contrast or opposition.

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This species of brutality, much easier to attain than the delicacy of Racine, has likewise gained many more proselytes: the pretended art of poetry of the Greeks has been thought justified by the example and success of Corneille: our stage has since that period teemed with atrocious speculators, who persuaded themselves that the most certain method of interesting the public, was to place before them scenes worthy of the *Greve*, or of *Tyburn*; they have infected it with scandalous epilepsies, given as the effect of passions carried to their highest pitch; and unhappily sometimes applauded. At the commencement of the present century in particular, a man appeared, who after his second tragedy, was supposed to possess in an eminent degree the talent of inventing refined villainies, of giving birth to heroes whose crimes our most shameful punishments were incapable of expiating: and of this indeed he afforded us a terrible specimen in his *Atrea*.

This first essay it is true, instantly inspired a just horror: the poet never after dared to indulge himself in such shocking barbarities; but far from his docility gaining him applause, instead of allowing him the credit due to his reformation, it was not even remarked in him: he was still thought to retain the gloomy enthusiasm of which,

he had been corrected; this error, by another inconsistency, became the groundwork of his glory and fame. He was decreed the honors due to the inventor of a new style. He was compared to the two masters at that time in possession of the French theatre, and as the town had without reflection, and contrary to reason and evidence, assigned to the one the exclusive province of the sublime, and to the second that of the pathetic; they decreed to the third the excellence of the *sombre* and terrible: this absurd distribution is still regarded as a just one by the public, though it is but necessary to open one's eyes to be made sensible of its impropriety.

Be it said at the present day, when there remains no more of Crebillon than his works, when his posterity is even extinct, and that in appreciating his productions according to their real merit, we run no risk of hurting the feelings of any one; that though he had actually possessed, and was strongly impelled to a display of this horrible talent, it was by no means proper to sanction it by applause. But he had it not, at least he was contented with a single effort; as since *Atrea*, which, as I have already said, was but the second of his pieces, and may consequently be regarded as his *debut*, he is no more *sombre* than any other: he is only somewhat more harsh in his style, and
oftentimes

oftentimes but a little more ridiculous in his plans.

Pyrrhus, the best, or rather the least insufferable of his pieces, presents scarcely any other than traits of virtue, there is not a drop of blood spilled. Rhadamistus is a foolish, rather than a wicked man: he describes himself as

“Virtuous without principle, vicious without design,”

“A foe to guilt; but yet no friend to virtue.”

and accordingly he discovers, till his death, nothing but inconsistency and irresolution.

Electra is a puerile assemblage of unconnected scenes, of rage without object and without grandeur; it is a romance, which unites the extremes of insipidity and absurdity. Even Clytemnestra is nothing; she appears in the piece but twice, the first time to load her daughter with abuse, the second to die with a jingle of words. In Semiramis, the plot is rather ridiculous than terrible, and the jargon of the *Precieuses* of Moliere, may appear as natural as that of the old Queen of Assyria, foolishly in love with her own son, whose mother she does not indeed believe herself to be.

In short, in Idomeneus, Xerxes, Cataline, the Triumvirate, there is no more horror than genius. It is evident then, that the author was

indebted solely for his fame as a deep tragedian, or of a writer worthy of being regarded as a model in the terrible style, to his *Atrea*; a shocking performance it is true, but which, far from being a *chef d'œuvre* in a new species, is but the last degree of licentiousness and depravity, to which a style already frightful in itself could descend, and which ought to have been stifled at its birth, rather than have been nursed into maturity.

It is impossible to conceive that there could ever exist in the human heart, more especially in youth, the idea of imagining, meditating on, and digesting such a plot; of superadding to the guilt which the Greek fable ascribes to the sons of *Tantalus*, the abominations with which the French piece is stained: a baleful spirit of revenge, nourished and concealed for twenty years, the son of *Thiestes*, supported during all this interval by the uncle as his own, with the design of one day making him the assassin of his father; the two successive reconciliations, which are but the same means of preparing, under two different forms, a double parricide; those fits of vengeance which escape *Atrea*, at which a drunken Iroquois, departing to burn his enemy at the stake, would blush; and that answer impossible to be qualified in

in *Thieftes*, who not being able to doubt that his son had been murdered, who beholding his blood before him, which he was about to drink, and whilst he touched the cup in which it was contained—hearing his brother ask him,

“ Know’st thou this blood ?”

replies in an epigram, in a play of words,

“ I know my brother ?”

And this abominable conclusion of the piece,

“ I now enjoy the fruit of all my crimes.”

A verse which shocks us the more, because in fact every thing has succeeded with the monster who pronounces it, and because he quits the stage in triumph. Do not these considerations prove *Atrea* to be the fruit of a scandalous madness, rather than a tragedy replete with terror ?

The author did not consider that the terrible, pushed to such an excess, becomes a puerility. An enraged grenadier, with a sabre in his hand, is without doubt an object of terror and alarm : but, if to make himself taller, he mounts upon stilts ; if, in order to seem more enraged, he covers his face with an illumined mask, he will then become a scare-crow, and frighten

children only; his enormous strides will but serve to render him the more ridiculous to the rational spectator. In like manner I think should we have determined on Atrea, and the pretended *sombre* of its author⁵.

One might be led to believe that Crebillon was indebted for his fame in general, at first to the dearth which prevailed in the theatre when he appeared there, and afterwards to the necessity under which hatred and jealousy labored, for

⁵ I recollect two lines of a piece I saw performed in my youth, very applicable to the subject. Previous to its representation, it had run through all the circles of Paris, read by the author according to custom. The young poet, as usual, was looked on as a new heir to Corneille and Racine, and as a competitor with Voltaire. His name already sufficiently famous, was about to eclipse them all. The sole embarrassment was to assign him a department which was not already occupied by one of his predecessors. The public settled the difficulty by damning the piece, which was not even suffered to be finished, like so many more honored with the like premature applause.

The couplet which in the readings had been most admired by the refined connoisseurs were these:

“ Herod, to avenge an affront, would without remorse
“ See the blood of his last subject flow.”

The pit was fired with indignation at this infernal ejaculation: it was received with universal execration and groans; but the audience have not always been actuated by the like equity, or political prudence.

want

want of a competitor, whom they might oppose and prefer to Mr. Voltaire. It has been said by some, that the public was never, or at least but for a short time, the dupe of cabal, that it was soon undeceived in all kind of ill-founded prejudice, this example and a thousand others prove the contrary. The public has, nevertheless, in part done justice to *Atrea*, by consigning it to oblivion; it has not done the like by *Rodogune*, because the taste of the people was not at that time formed, and that after all, *Corneille*, even in his extravagancies, still merited some regard. It were to be wished that mankind may never more suffer themselves to be seduced by unnatural contorsions, which are still sometimes daringly presented as symptoms of grief, and that they will no longer endure the stage, or the art of poetry, to be prostituted to licentious orgies, and bacchanalian screams, where they should be devoted to instructive and pathetic sorrow.

Mr. Voltaire seems to have feared to lay down the precept; but he has at least given the example. He has extended still further than *Racine*, that delicacy, the purity of which, ought ever to have been inseparable from these arts. He has none of those disgusting characters, none of that horror which excites indignation, even against
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the author ; he moves the heart and interests the soul ; he forces tears from his audience ; he gives useful lessons, while employing no other resource than the representation of calamities from which the purest conscience cannot always preserve mankind, and honorable sentiments, which the passions may sometimes combat, but which can never become extinct in virtuous minds.

Gusman, in *Alzira*, is harsh and haughty, but he is neither base nor cruel ; Zamora, *Alzira*, *Alvares*, *Monteza*, are amiable, noble, and magnanimous ; nor are they on that account the less interesting. The Duke de Foix is violent and even brutal ; nevertheless we can neither hate nor despise him. *Orbassan*, in *Tancred*, is humbled, but not debased : *Affur* and *Polifontes* in *Semiramis* and *Merope*, are not very distinguished characters, but they are not loaded with that guilt which gives pain to the beholder, or inspires him with horror and disgust. *Polifontes* and *Semiramis* are indeed blackened with guilt, but their crimes are long past, nor do they form the subject of the piece : their remorse, the punishment of the repenting wife in the one, and the maternal tenderness of the other, are all that interest in the representation. In short, except *Mahomet* and *Cataline* (for I do not impute *Cedipus* to him, his first essay, a subject

subject forced on him in his youth, and which was neither agreeable to his choice, nor to his taste,) except these two, there is not throughout all his tragedies, one part which can cause a blush in the actor who represents it; nor is this delicacy of less importance to genuine taste in literature, than to good order in society. And of these two exceptions, there is but one in which he is censurable. In Cataline, he was guided by history: he is reproachable rather in the choice of the subject, than in his mode of treating it: but Mahomet is wholly his own invention; and I own I cannot conceive that he should voluntarily, and contrary to historical truth, make a legislator, the founder of a great empire, of a religion still more extensive, vicious without object, cruel without a view, and a parricide without motive: he has elsewhere too loaded him with praise: what an idea, to repair to the theatre deliberately to tarnish a name venerated by one half of the globe, a character never yet reproached with one sanguinary act, no trick of deceit, except that of affirming himself sent from God; a false mission, but maintained by heroism and not by cruelty!

Add to this, that in this same piece, wherein the hero is so cruelly disfigured, the moral precept which the author proposes to deduce from

it, is not more happily established: neither is the title of the tragedy justified, or the end obtained. The view of the author is to excite our abhorrence at the enthusiasm inspired by fanaticism; and it is evident that fanaticism is in no sort the principle of the drama which bears the title of it.

The murder committed by Zeide, is an effect of military obedience, rather than religious zeal. It is his General he obeys, not his God: he feels remorse: he imagines that he is committing a crime, an idea which is inconsistent with fanaticism: the character and danger of this terrible alienation of the mind, consists in nothing more strongly than in the metamorphose it produces by erecting crimes into virtues, and degrading virtues into crimes; an alarming fascination which has conducted such characters as *Poltrou*, *Clement*, *Girard*, *Diaz*, *Chatel*, &c. to the most shocking actions with the calm of the purest conscience. This state the author himself has happily described in his *Henriade*.

He introduces the shade of the Duke de Guise, encouraging the Dominican friar to the commission of the crime; he recalls to his remembrance the idea of his own murder, perpetrated by Henry the third.

“ These

“ These wounds, Valois, by his assassins made,
Punish his perfidy, and pierce his heart;
Shrink not at an assassin's horrid name,
In thee 'tis virtue, tho' 'twas crime in him.

— — — — —
The young recluse, too easily deceived,
Imagin'd he had heav'n's concerns in trust.

— — — — —
Full of the fiend that had inflam'd his ire,
Devoutly he for parricide prepares.

— — — — —
The soul of Clement happy, and at ease,
Was with that confidence inspir'd, which none
But saints in perfect innocence enjoy.”

This is fanaticism, and assuredly Zeide has nothing of it.

He supposes also that he is murdering a foe: he is ignorant that it is his own father he is about to put to death: had he known this; if, while his arm was raised, his birth had been revealed to him, and he had still persisted to sacrifice an idolater, if he had imagined he was making a sacrifice to his religion, not only by trampling on the ordinary rights of humanity, but even on those of nature, fanaticism had then appeared in all its fury and its danger; the spectacle would have been horrid.—True: but the moral would have been striking: it would perhaps have been an exception to the principle

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I have just laid down, not to introduce too great a degree of atrociousness on the scene.

Lastly, This parricide even, this assassination of Zopirus, by the hand of his son, is, in the piece of which we are speaking, but a mere caprice in Mahomet, or rather in the author, and unfortunately a copy of Atrea, it has no connection with religion, it is no way necessary, it is founded neither on probability nor expediency; the manner in which it is conceived, conducted, perpetrated, and punished, is altogether unskilful: but it is the only error of the kind with which Mr. Voltaire can be accused; nor does it prevent his title to the applause I have lately bestowed on him.

Add to this, what may serve to excuse the one, and still further to justify the other, that the character of Mahomet is possessed of grandeur; he is not a mean and base villain, like Mathan, Narcissus, and Felix: take from the latter their turpitude and atrociousness, nothing more remains of them; whereas that of Mahomet, independent of this unnecessary murder, and still more useless poisoning with which it is sullied, will still be interesting, and even grand.

However this may be, posterity will find in the theatre of Mr. Voltaire, as in that of his predecessors, after defects which will justify criticism,

criticism, striking beauties, which will no less certainly ensure applause. The modern author will probably be censured, in general, for the lameness of his plots, and above all the weakness of the principal incidents on which they turn. It will appear strange for instance, that the plot of *Tancred* should consist wholly in omitting the direction of a letter; it may seem inconceivable, that on such a discovery, *Amenaide*, the daughter of the most venerable knight of *Syracuse*, of the oldest chieftain of the state, should be condemned on the spot, and led forth to punishment, that she should entrust no one, not even her father, with the secret which proves her innocence.

Gengiskan may perhaps appear little and pusillanimous, especially when contrasted with *Idamea*. The void which surrounds *Semiramis* may perhaps seem surprising, a void but ill supplied by *Arzaces* and *Azema*, whose amours are neither sufficiently violent or complicated, to interest many spectators. Posterity will perhaps be of opinion that the ghost of *Ninus* is a prodigy wholly inefficient, and very far from being productive of consequences worthy of so much parade; and that the poet having introduced it as a means of remedying the languor
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of our theatre, ought to have given it more action and importance.

It will be said, that it would not at first have been suffered, had he given it more force. I believe nothing of this, on the contrary I think that it is its insignificancy alone, which has rendered it ridiculous : I am of opinion, that had he given this spectacle all the pomp and energy which it is capable of receiving, had the phantom before it appears to our view, been previously announced to us, by those hollow groans which are but hinted at in the piece ; if, instead of appearing at the moment to order in vague terms a sacrifice to his ashes, he had himself revealed the crime that was to be expiated, and possessed his son with those facts which proved it ; if, instead of assuming the puerile form of a man clothed in white, with his face covered with meal, that is to say, in the absurd and irrational attire we affix to an inhabitant of the other world, it had manifested itself by some external sign, by those attributes of terror which prevent or overwhelm reflection ; for instance, by such a circumstance as is recorded in the history of Daniel, of an illumined hand which traces flaming characters on the wall ; I doubt not but it would have met with the greatest success.

It is not easy to foresee to which of his pieces posterity will give the preference. He has already experienced at the hands of the public the same selection, if we may use the term, to which Corneille and Racine have been doomed to submit. All the pieces of the latter have maintained their ground on the theatre, except three; one of which was never intended for it, and the two others are the production of early youth. Corneille is computed to have written at least thirty, of which six or seven only have retained the honor of representation. Mr. Voltaire, if I mistake not, has written twenty-four, whereof, to the best of my recollection, nine have hitherto constantly supported themselves on the stage.

It is from amongst these nine then, that we are to fix our choice, and if the election were mine, I should give it to *Alzira*: this piece seems to me to be in the theatre of Voltaire, what *Iphigene* is in that of Racine: the outlines of the two are very different, but their excellence, as it bears a relation to those which have gone before, and succeeded them, appears to me to be pretty nearly the same. I do not say that *Alzira* is superior to *Iphigenia*, but I think the one the master-piece of Voltaire, as the other is that of Racine.

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Before

Before I conclude this head, I think it incumbent upon me to say something in support of my former decision on *Zara*, a piece received with so much enthusiasm at its birth; the success of which seems no ways impaired by time, a piece of which the author has always spoken with satisfaction, and hitherto incontestably ranked by his partizans among his best productions. I must either justify my opinion, or at least explain the grounds of it.

First, I think that the three first acts of this tragedy are cold, languid, unconnected with, and even useless to the piece: it can be said to begin but at the sixth scene of the third, wherein *Zara* evades the importunities of *Orosmanes*.

In the first there is neither explanation nor commencement of interest, since it relates only to the marriage of the Sultan, and that this marriage is not described as capable of meeting with the least difficulty. The piece finishes with the order given to *Nereftan* to be out of the dominions of *Orosmanes* the next day before sun-rise. We see no reason why this order should not be executed.

And it would have been so, but for a wink given by *Nereftan* to young *Odali*; but this resource appears to me an additional defect; it would not even be perceived, if the author

had not caused it to be taken notice of by Orosmanes himself, by supposing in the latter a presentiment of jealousy contrary to reason.—He could have no cause to fear, or the audience any ground to suppose, that Zara, whose heart was full of her lover, to whom she had lately made the most explicit declaration of her passion, and whom she had heard refuse her ransom, that Zara, who from the very first scene, has declared that tenderness in her soul would triumph over the remaining feeble ideas of Christianity implanted in her youth, should resolve, from a nod of the head, to incur every risk, in order to procure an interview with the Christian adventurer, whom the Sultan had in good humour dismissed: and nevertheless if Nerestan returns not, it is clear there can be no tragedy.

In the second act, the unexpected appearance of Lusignan, and even the very romantic and highly improbable recognition of him by Zara, neither constitutes a plot in the piece nor a commencement of interests, since we perceive no danger to which Zara can be exposed from revealing the secret of her birth; we feel that Orosmanes is too generous and too deeply in love, at hearing this, to give up his mistress from a scruple of religion.—A Sultan delicate enough to dismiss his eunuchs, would not be

so timid as to hesitate marrying a pretty Christian, with whom he is violently enamoured, from a fear of displeasing his *Muftis*.

Besides he acquires an additional right to the possession of a conquered country, by an alliance with the daughter of its former monarch. We can only consider as a mere caprice in Lufignan, and a proof of the embarrassment of the poet, that verse on which, notwithstanding, the whole piece hinges :

“ O thou whom I dare not name,

“ Swear to keep so fatal a secret.”

In fact, if Zara declares her name before Orofmanes, the tragedy ceases.—Thus, at the end of the second act, the audience is always perfectly easy as to the fate of all the characters.—In the third act, the exhortations, more violent than christianlike, or pathetic, of Nereftan to his sister, his cruelty in insisting that she should be baptized previous to her marriage, still present nothing terrible, and the more so, as after his declaration that he shall return soon to see that ceremony performed, and by consequence, as this obstacle cannot continue for any length of time, we continually expect to see Zara and the other characters delivered from their embarrassment by a confession of her birth.

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The piece does not then in reality begin, till the scene where she refuses to comply with the earnestness of the Sultan, and requires a delay. But the part she acts in this is so weak, she fails so cruelly, and with an embarrassment so causeless, so ill justified by any apparent motive, and so ill expressed even poetically, to the generous Orosmanes; that she excites our indignation rather than our attachment; accordingly, we applaud the haughtiness of the lover, who has recourse to eastern manners, and orders "the doors of the seraglio to be for ever shut."

Here the plot, the danger, and the conflict of passions begin, and consequently the interest of the spectators; thus, in fact, the piece consists but of two acts, which are sustained by Orosmanes alone. Zara is continually indolent, silent, inanimate, and consequently uninteresting; but further, Orosmanes is but Roxana metamorphosed, which detracts considerably, if not from its impression on the theatre, at least from its merit to the reader.

And again, around Roxana what action, what passion, what a number of characters, all striking, all distinguished, and all worthy of the wishes and the admiration of the spectator! How great is Achmet! How pathetic is Atalida! How noble is Bajazet! How are all their interests united,

interwoven together, if we may use the expression; how do they exalt the character of the Sultana without obscuring it! But in *Zara* we see but *Orosmanes*; it is a print into which the artist conveys but one figure of the grand picture which he copied.

Lastly, *Zara* is very feebly written; it is perhaps, of all Mr. Voltaire's pieces, written in the most negligent style, which is the more surprising because although, if, as it is said, he composed it in eighteen days, he was thirty years in correcting it; and that from the very nature of the subject he ought to have made greater efforts to approach the perfection of Racine in this, than in any other performance.

But it will be asked, how did it succeed at first? How comes it still to maintain its ground? It is probable that its success has been owing to the circumstance of an actress appearing in the character who was then in all the splendor of youth and beauty: the person and voice of Mademoiselle Goffin gave birth to the illusion; a form and voice very different, as were those of Le Kain, served to prolong it by varying its object.

This actor, little indebted to nature, but endowed with a powerful talent for performing characters strongly marked, gave equal energy

to

to the port of Orosmanes as that of Zara had received attractions from Mademoiselle Goffin. At the end of twenty years, it has fared with this success as with many others, the merit of which is not recurred to when it is once established, as we may instance in the character of Rodogune, which gives pleasure to none, and which all, notwithstanding, affect to admire.

all notwithstanding, affect to observe
great religious observances, and which
as we may infer from the character of those
who are reported to witness it, or especially
those who are with many others, the merit of
At the end of twenty years, it was found with
relative attention from Madisonville, Ga.
to the part of Ordinance, as that of 1845 had

OF
MR. VOLTAIRE'S
COMEDIES.

IT is to the Greeks that we are indebted for Comedy as well as Tragedy; this ingenious people, when they created the names of Melpomene and Thalia, assigned to each her separate department, and these were both equally licentious. If the former imagined the only means of forcing tears were by dreadful horrors, the second fought to excite our laughter by the most cruel satire. Thus the defamation of the living, or the dead, was the sole resource of the dramatic art in its infancy.

It should seem that with so near an affinity to each other, these two branches might have been cultivated by the same hand: what I have before observed of the compatibility of opposite talents uniting in the same man, appears to me incapable
of

of contradiction: I could have supported this theory by many other examples taken from the ancients, but, by a strange contradiction, those two species, the union of which seemed apparently most easy, are precisely such as never existed among them: the art of introducing characters on a stage, discoursing in dialogue, and of depicting, by their attitude and their expressions, the secret emotions they feel, has ever remained divided at Rome and at Athens, into two distinct departments.

In an age when warriors studied eloquence, when the most profound philosophers and the severest legislators became the rivals of Æsop and Anacreon, in the composition of moral fables, or licentious ballads; the author, who in a dialogue entitled Tragedy, represented Phædra inflamed with a violent and miserable passion, Theseus at once credulous and jealous, Hippolitus haughty and unfeeling, never imagined it possible that he could have successfully delineated the same picture in a piece called Comedy: two words which had no manner of relation to what they signified. And on the other hand, Aristophanes, Menander, Plautus, or Terence, seemed to feel no inducement to entwine the wreaths of Melpomene with those of Thalia.

Most

Most assuredly this scruple, or this timidity, is not founded in the nature of things, or in any inability of the poets. It is an inconsistency, whereof examples are not uncommon; and for which it is impossible at the present, perhaps at any time, to assign any sufficient reason.

The Spaniards, as I said before, confounded these two species of composition, or rather they were unacquainted with either of them. Their pieces are as far from Sophocles or Terence as from Aristophanes and Euripides. They, notwithstanding, adopted the general name of Comedy for all kinds of dramatic dialogue, whether humorous or pathetic, it was always the *Comedia famosa*.

Our first poets, as I have remarked, being no other than their disciples, or rather their copyists, gave no other title to their works, whatever was the subject of them, Oroondates and Amestris, as well as the Visionaries or the Pedant, were alike deemed comedies. Mad. de Sevigné never gives any other name to the dramatic works of Corneille than that of comedy, and he had then produced all his good pieces: she gives the like title to those of Racine, after Andromache, Iphigenia, and Bajazet. The term of tragedy even at present is unknown in Spain and Italy, and it is of very recent date in France.

It

It is no way surprising then, that the modern candidates for theatric fame should have retained the privilege of passing from one of these departments to the other of them. The obscene Hauteroche was not deterred from writing a tragedy, as bad indeed and as insipid as his comedies, excepting only one, are filthy and disgusting. The affected Marivaux has likewise attempted the buskin, in common with many more: but generally speaking, few have gained any applause from the attempt.

The Liar of Corneille has alone remained on the theatre, and that is considered as a model. Racine has written but one comedy; which is extremely amusing: it is only to be lamented that the essence of it evaporates, as we may say, in the representation, or cloyes from the labour which the actors give it. Mr. Voltaire has availed himself of the like talent, but is it with equal success?

Doubtless we might have expected, that the man of his age who was best acquainted with pleasantry and even with satire, who when he was so disposed has portrayed the vices and follies of his fellow-creatures with the greatest strength, energy, and grace, in direct terms, would have been equally successful in exhibiting them personified, as we may say; when the vivacity of action
was

was superadded to the liveliness of style; and this might have been with greater reason expected of Mr. Voltaire, as he devoted himself to this labour at an age when his taste had attained its greatest perfection, when he was the most perfect master of style and the choice of his subject; when experience must have completely initiated him into the intricacies of society, which he lashed in the strongest and most pointed manner in his other writings. Nevertheless he was no longer the same, when desirous of assuming that office in dialogue.

In his romances, in his tales, in his discussions, apparently of the most serious nature, we meet with sallies which excite bursts of laughter, or sly strokes of wit, which afford a more refined, though a less sensible gratification; but his comedies are very far from possessing either of these excellencies.

It is true there are three which are still retained on the stage, and which we see exhibited with pleasure, the *Prodigal*, *Nanette*, and the *Scotch Woman*, but these are more properly affecting romances than comedies. They have kept their ground by those serious passages of philosophical, moral, or sentimental matter with which they abound. *Euphemon*, *Eliza*, *Nanette*, are far from exciting gaiety: even *Freeport*, who in a
great

great measure decided the fate of the Scotch Woman, is not lively, though possessed of dignity: and Wasp is more horrid, base, and disgusting, than comic. An immoderate desire of revenge in the author, has caused him to lay aside that scrupulosity, politeness, and candour, which prevented him from sullyng his tragedies with similar characters.

In general, the few pleasantries hazarded by Mr. Voltaire in all his pieces, which are entitled comedies, are of a very inferior cast, more nearly approaching to the forced burlesque of Scarron, than the nature and gaiety of Moliere. Even the Prodigal, M. Rondon, Fierenfat, are not so distant from Don Japhet as may be supposed.

The false taste which makes Don Japhet, and whatever resembles it, insupportable, is an affected search after ludicrous terms, an effort to supply by a pretended play of words the deficiency of an author incapable of throwing pleasantry into the situation or the ideas; and this is the more disgusting in the Prodigal, as that piece is full of pathetic traits excellently written, in which grandeur is combined with the most affecting simplicity.

It is still worse in the other comedies of Mr. Voltaire, when he is desirous of making his speakers humorous. In support of this assertion, it
would

would be easy to multiply extracts * which would justify me in the strange comparison I have just made between him who, when he pleased, was the most polished and elegant wit, the most exact observer of decency of the present century, and the most obscene, insipid, and disgusting buffoon of the beginning of the last.

Again, one cannot recover from the astonishment into which we are thrown, at beholding a writer of the most exquisite taste, I repeat it, who possessed in the greatest degree the *ton* of good company, who even gave it to those of his time; he, who in all his other writings discovered the utmost delicacy, grace, and ease, who has most successfully, and with a delicacy peculiar to himself, exposed in other writers the breaches they committed against decency and propriety, mistake for theatrical humour that stiffness of style, that stale pedantry, or those rebuses and gross equivoques, too nearly bordering on puns, so justly proscribed in all genteel circles, and which at the present day would be scarcely tolerated in the lower ranks of society.

These, it will be said, were the recreations of a great man. Lelius and Scipio amused themselves in making ducks and drakes; true, but

* The author has in fact given several, but as they turn chiefly on verbal allusions, they cannot well be rendered in another language.

they

they did not make the public witness to these amusements of their leisure hours.

And what seems still more incredible, is that Mr. Voltaire should be fond of this low stuff, he introduces it sometimes even into his prose, and under his own name: let us confess it at once, and have done with it. When his bile was once kindled, he indulged himself in this contemptible ribaldry; at the best only worthy of Scarron or Rabelais, or rather of Father Garasse, whom he has so violently condemned.

When reproaching the decree of the Sorbonne against Bellisarius, he attributes it to a Bachelor of Divinity, because the word is commonly enough used in schools. He calls M. L'Abbé Riballier, *Ribaudier*; he sometimes makes of Sabatier, *Savatier*, sometimes *Sabotier*; of Gayan, *Coyon*, and all this he prints. These allegories, to use his own language towards Father Garasse, differ somewhat from those of Virgil and Ovid, and I cannot see, whilst he indulged himself in the use of them, how he could impute it as a crime in the Jesuit to have called Theophilus a calf, because his family name was Veau.

Let us blush at this weakness which I have here mentioned, because it is established beyond all question by public documents, and rather not to have appeared to dissemble, than to force
it

it into notice. Let us lament that Mr. Voltaire either had not himself, or did not consult with friends possessed of the requisite delicacy, and sufficiently tenacious of his reputation, to caution him against such an abuse of his talents. It were to be wished that there may be one day found an editor of his works bold enough to expunge these distressing blemishes. I am even of opinion, that in suppressing all his comedies, except those which are still performed, the loss would be scarcely perceptible. They possess neither in design, or digression, any thing worthy of regret.

The first and the last pieces of Corneille it is true are always printed together with those of his happiest moments, but the disparity is far less apparent. This great man is often a prodigy of genius, but never a model of taste. For a contrary reason it seems, we ought to save Mr. Voltaire's enlightened readers the pain of such passages as are unworthy of him, and from those who are not so we should remove the danger of passing them over unperceived.

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ON

OF
MR. VOLTAIRE'S
FUGITIVE,
AND OTHER
POETICAL PIECES.

HITHERTO I have adventured to criticize, and dare believe that the impartial reader will equally acquit me of unmerited censure as ill founded applause; but justice now consists in admiration. If aught can redeem the inconceivable weakness of Mr. Voltaire's comedies, it must doubtless be his fugitive pieces; a species of writing in which he has no superior, and scarcely any equal. In the midst of labors, apparently the most foreign from such a pursuit, he cultivated this airy kind of literature; he enriched it, seemingly without thinking of it, with an infinite variety of pieces, all varied, and sparkling with wit, taste, and knowledge—it was Phidias, who while at work

on the Olympian Jupiter, strewed the floor of his work-shop with fragments of ivory and gold.

Under this head I comprehend that multitude of little pieces on every subject, which flowed from him without effort, and which seemed to cost him no more than a madrigal—such as tales wherein variety and ornament are blended with gaiety; epistles, satires, and above all treatises in verse; productions of his happiest moments—of that period when he laboured with the greatest care—when the apprehension of enemies, ever prone to censure, preserved him from the negligence into which confidence and habitual success afterwards betrayed him; in all these several kinds of composition, his name will ever be ranked amongst the most celebrated, and will often be regarded as the first.

Not that he has written as many satires as Boileau, or as many tales as La Fontaine; but amongst those of the former, how few are there really worthy of their author? And to the tales of the latter may we not successfully oppose the Poor Devil, and the Russian at Paris? It will be said that the style is different. Doubtless it is; if they were copies could they be compared?

The Poor Devil abounds too much in personalities, and they are too harsh; this again is granted: *Grisset* is cruelly lampooned in it, and he

he had never injured the author. I acknowledge it—I do not excuse the latter; it is one of his greatest defects—but were *Quinault*, *Bursaut*, or *Hainaut* more criminal towards the modern Juvenal? The question here rests; not on the moral, but literary merit of these pieces.

With regard to epistles, does not Mr. Voltaire, who has incontestably the advantage in point of number, possess it likewise in that of variety, agreeableness, and perhaps of utility? Under this title I include his seven treatises on Moderation, on the Nature of Man, &c. Has Boileau ever written finer verses than these?

“ Can Sylva’s self th’ œconomy explain,
Which works digestion, and makes food sustain;
How the bile through so many channels flows!
How, by degrees, ’tis filtrated, and goes
To pour into my veins a purple tide,
By which both strength and spirits are supply’d;
Which makes the pulse of life incessant beat,
And makes the brain intelligence’s seat?”

The author of the *Lutrin* congratulates himself on having, as he said in prose, happily enough satyrised the *Peruque*. Would he not with more justice have applauded the preceding description, had it been his own?

Shall we find in any poet, or in any language, many passages superior to those which occur in

the Treatise on the Equality of Conditions among Men?

Whilst, like Boileau, he treated moral and useful subjects with dignity, Mr. Voltaire intermingled philosophy and gaiety in his epistles, which Boileau did not; he likewise enriched them by descriptions of the manners of the world, by masterly and just traits, worthy of Moliere; which redoubles my astonishment when I reflect on his comedies.

For instance, in his epistle entitled the Life of Paris and Versailles, he introduces two women visiting each other.

“ Visits her friend, in pomp and state,
 Ascends, and then repents too late,
 Embracing yawns, and plain is seen
 In her constrain'd behaviour, spleen;
 She seems to beg for nonsense gay,
 To make her languor pass away;
 They interchange some faint caresses,
 They talk of weather, plays, and dresses;
 Of sermons, and of ribbons price,
 And are exhausted in a trice.
 Now through necessity grown dumb,
 A tune they both begin to hum;
 But Mr. Abbé enter'd soon,
 Priest, gallant, sharper, and buffoon;
 Endow'd with various talents rare,
 Who for some months was master there.
 A formal coxcomb enter'd too,
 Pleas'd in the glass himself to view;

Both pedants pleas'd, their jargon suits—
A captain enters, both are mutes."

How can we reconcile it, that he who had so happily caught these impressions, who was thus able to express them in soliloquy, when speaking in the first person, should be incapable of animating them in dialogue, of assigning them a language corresponding to their actions? It is, that generally speaking, on the theatre as in epic poetry, all he knew, all he was capable of, was to design a figure, he was unable to give it animation.

In his Epistles on Agriculture, who can read unmoved those verses addressed to a *petit maitre*, who thinks it impossible to live any where but amidst the bustle and pleasures of the world. It were endless to point out passages of this nature; and besides, the works where they are to be met with, are too well known to render it necessary.

As to the art of narration, in the *naïveté* of his fables, and the sprightliness of his tales, wherein consists the principal merit of La Fontaine, he is far from being equal throughout; but in his choice passages he is enchanting. *Ce qui plait aux dames Gertrude, les trois Manieres, &c.* with a different kind of merit, must they not be allowed that, of affording infinite pleasure?

I remember having formerly heard Mr. Voltaire reproached, with having taken his *Fee Urgulle* from the English Chaucer if I mistake not; but has La Fontaine invented even one of his subjects? Is he not indebted to Æsop, to Phædrus, &c. for the ground of his fables, and for that of his tales to the Queen of Navarre, to Boccace, and from that Canon from whom so little edifying is to be gained, who compiled the *Moyen de parvenir*?

Another criticism, as ill founded as the last, is that which recurs to me on the *Trois Manieres*: this idea it is said, is pillaged from the *Daughters of Mineus* of La Fontaine. Which is saying, that the poet of the 18th century has entered the lists against him of the 17th; true—but what do they possess in common? Nothing—but having each written a piece containing three stories; one of them pathetic, another humorous, and a third of a composite nature—but Raphael has painted the Holy Family; and Rubens the Jordans; can these be deemed plagiarists, because they have both introduced Virgins attending on Jesus and St. John? Orosmanes is really an enfeebled copy, but the *Trois Manieres*, though twice described, are, notwithstanding, both originals.

If Mr. Voltaire be thus capable of maintaining, without disadvantage, the comparison between these

these two justly celebrated poets, how great is his superiority when compared with Voiture, Chapelle, Chaulieu, and Piron. He rises superior to all in the number of his pieces, and to each of them in ease and sprightliness; he continually presents us with ingenious similes, and allusions at once poignant and instructive: we discover in them the delicacy and lightness of the man of the world, united with the dignity and ease of the philosopher; and what, as I have already observed, is not always to be found in his Tragedies or *Henriade*, the correctness of expression keeps pace with that of thought.

The little which remains to us of Voiture is buried in the multiplicity of insipidities with which he abounds, and which have had as great a run, and have equally contributed to his reputation with those pieces which can bear the ordeal of good taste: it is the same with de Chapelle.

I open Chaulieu, that Chaulieu so celebrated by Voltaire himself; I do not find a single piece sustained throughout, not one copy of verses wherein the poet, either fatigued or careless, did not appear to hold his readers in contempt, or seemed to have forgotten that he wished to make, or thought he was making verses. One of his best epistles, is that on the death of the Marquis de la

la Fare; and in this we meet with many lines in rhyme, which are not even tolerable prose.

I open also the collection of Piron's works, a poet of reputation, especially for the lighter kind of productions, whose name one dramatic work alone has assisted, or established; but well known for his epigrams and convivial sallies, still more than by his *Metromania*. See his manner of addressing women—women to whom he owed respect and gratitude, in his madrigal addressed to Mad. de Tencin, the Geofrin of her time.

It is well known that she gave the literary men who were used to meet at her house the name of “her beasts;” a title sufficiently droll, and expressive of very little esteem on either side. To these beasts she was accustomed every year to make a present of a pair of velvet breeches. Piron one day sent her a straw-hat, accompanied with this epigram, the point of which, if it may be said to possess any, consists in the most disgusting grossness: compare it with the madrigals of Mr. Voltaire, and then form an opinion.

The only censure to which the latter is justly liable in these productions, is somewhat too much monotony in many of his fugitive pieces; too strong an aptitude, as I have already said, to bestow praise, whether on the great, whom he feared, or men of letters, whose good opinion he wished

to

to conciliate; this spirit reigns so strongly throughout these eulogiums, that they rarely seem sincere, and still less often are they just; but what signifies this to posterity? Who now interest themselves in the enquiry whether Glycera was as pretty, and Canidia as ugly as Horace pretends? And will the greater part of those, thus immortalized by Mr. Voltaire, be better known than Glycera and Canidia?

PART

PART THE SECOND.

OF

MR. VOLTAIRE'S

PROSE WORKS.

PART THE SECOND

M. VOLTARE

P. O. S. T. W. O. R. K. S.

OF
MR. VOLTAIRE'S
PROSE WORKS,

THIS is the field in which Mr. Voltaire might be truly said to triumph; at least, the applause he gains or forces from his readers, when addressing them in a language divested of the pomp, the pretensions, we may even say the embarrassments of poetry, is then much less liable to exception. A purity of elocution, a justness of epithet, a profusion of ideas, perspicuity and energy of expression, neatness of style, and harmony of period, gaiety, dignity, all are here found, united with an ease, a facility, and an art of familiarizing every subject, in a manner before him unparalleled.

I have heard it much regretted by some enlightened men, whose opinion I think it an honor to adopt, that, after producing *Tancred*,
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he had not abandoned poetry in general, and especially that of the theatre, in order to devote himself wholly to historical and philosophic prose, retaining at most for his amusement but the lighter species of poetry, which, except in the mechanical habit of rhyme, cost him no pains whatever. They contend, that this author would have acquired more extensive fame had he adopted this idea, had he only increased his prosaic works with an equal number of excellent productions, as he has swelled the list of his tragedies with feeble pieces, which, though brought forth with less labor, reflect less credit on his memory.

I say, that this labor, to which he has given too evident a preference, would have cost him less: nothing is more certain. I shall not enter here into a formal disquisition on the merits or demerits of these two species of composition, nor investigate deeply whether it be more laborious for a writer to be subjected to the rules of poetry; which, though they may sometimes cramp his genius, more frequently support and aid him in concealing his weakness; than to form a style of his own, wherein, as he can have no other guide than a just taste and a good ear, his judges are the more rigid, as they are not to be misled by a laboured harmony—where suc-
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ness is not enhanced by having surmounted difficulty, nor a failure of it palliated in having had it to oppose. Perhaps it might not be so difficult to prove as is generally imagined, that the apparent freedom of the one style is no more compatible with moderate genius, than the real servitude of the other.

Eminent prose writers are at least as scarce as eminent poets. In Greece the latter title is bestowed on Homer, Hesiod; Pindar, Simonides, Anacreon, Theocritus, Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Menander, Cratesepolis, and several others. We find Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle, Demosthenes, and, in a later age, Polybius and Plutarch, are all who have been honored with the former epithet. Again, in several of these, it is the subject we admire, more than the style: they are judicious authors, rather than models of fine writing.

The age of Augustus offers us Lucretius, Terence, Plautus, Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Catullus, Tibullus, Martial, Juvenal, Lucan, &c. deemed, though with different degrees of merit, the flower of Latin poetry; in the prose of that language we have but Titus Livy, Cicero, Sallust, Tacitus, the two Plinys, and Seneca, which

at least, in point of number, do not make an equal balance.

Look alike into the literature of all nations who have cultivated the fine arts, and have any pretensions to fame, whether in poetry or eloquence; we shall find by the same singularity, that those who have most distinguished themselves in that kind of composition wherein a display of genius seemed most difficult, are in point of number, at least equal, and oftentimes superior, to such who have confined themselves to one, seemingly most easy. Appearances then must have been fallacious in this matter; and it should appear that the practice of one of these idioms must at least be subject to as many difficulties as the other.

Still further, may we not say, that poetry is in some sort the infantine language of the human mind? It is in verse that it lisps its feeble efforts, incapable of expressing itself in prose, till arrived at its full maturity and strength. Look into the history of the origin of all nations, of every code of legislation, and system of philosophy, you will find poets and verses in the first dawnings of civilization.

Homer preceded Herodotus, and Orpheus, Linus, and many other poets, had preceded
Homer.

Homer. Ennius wrote the annals of Rome in hexameter verse, before any one thought of digesting them into the language of common intercourse. Moses, the first prose writer of his country, has preserved in Canticles, hymns composed by himself, in a measure of which he was not the inventor. The Hebrews then had their Orpheus also before their Herodotus.

Among ourselves, did not our whole stock of literature for a long time consist of rude romances, peices composed of barbarous verses, but in measure, and subject to rhythmical quantity, and returning rhymes? The newly discovered savages, who could scarcely be said to have any language or society, and no writing, had, notwithstanding, their jugglers, conjurers, and poets.

May we not hence conclude, that poetry is the expression most natural to man, and consequently the easier; and that a dignified, elegant, and sublime prose, such as that of great writers must necessarily be, is in reality the perfection of language; since the latter cannot be acquired till the former has attained its full maturity?

Lastly, there is a third consideration, of no less weight if the question were to be seriously discussed, which is, that among the moderns at least, all the distinguished prose writers desirous

of becoming poets, have succeeded in the attempt; whereas it is but rarely that the best poets have, with labor, even been able to produce any tolerable prose.

This remark, it is true, will hold good with respect to the moderns only; among the ancients, by a continuance of the same absurdity which I have already remarked seemed to have entirely separated the provinces of tragedy and comedy, we do not find that poetry and prose were ever cultivated by the same hand: none of those names I have enumerated are to be found in both lists. Historians, so little scrupulous in other points, in such like frauds, have never dreamed of attributing any treatise in prose to Scipio or Lelius, who were attached to verse, and were suspected of having a share in Terence's works. We have some obscene epigrams attributed to the celebrated usurper who founded the empire of the Cæsars; but he has not left a line of prose; there exists not even a madrigal attributed to the real Cæsar, Livy, Sallust, Tacitus, or Cicero, to all those prose writers who constitute the glory of Roman eloquence.

But in our languages, which are formed from a mixture of the barbarous idioms of the North with those of Greece and Rome, it has been otherwise. If Cervantes and Machiavel are not

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at the head of the poets of their respective nations, as they are models to them in prose writing, they have notwithstanding succeeded on the theatre, and consequently are no strangers to this division of poetical empire. Addison, one of the authors who has most contributed to ennoble the English prose, has likewise enriched the London theatre with one of its best pieces, and several operas. Milton, the Homer of Great-Britain, is one of its most prolific prose writers, if not one of its most esteemed.

In France, all those celebrated romance writers, who were at first deemed the honor of our literature, and who at present seem, perhaps contrary to all reason and justice, to be considered the disgrace of it, Calpremede, Gomberville, Scuderi, Durier, Desmarets, Voiture, &c. have with the greatest facility passed from one department to the other, and they began with making rhymes; versification and the drama were the amusement of their youth; it was reserved for a maturer age to develope a taste and a talent for prose.

Moliere, Hamilton, La Motte, Fontenelle, and a thousand others, have possessed this two-fold faculty, and with the like success, but always in such a way as to make it apparent, that prose was the real and serious employment of their talents,

and that the most laboured poetical productions were an amusement to them. Is it not strange that Corneille, Boileau, La Fontaine, J. B. Rousseau, so superior each of them in the several kinds of poetry to which they were attached, should have sunk even beneath mediocrity, when desirous of making excursions into her sister's kingdom, reputed of such easy access.

Racine is the only one, not, who as it is said, gathered the double palm before Mr. Voltaire, but who from lofty poetry could descend to prose with grace and ease; the only one whose genius has preserved the same excellence in the labored decoration of the pretended language of the gods, and the grand simplicity of the real language of man.

Is it not possible to account for this singular fact, to assign some cause for the apparently limited powers of the one, and the contradictory fecundity of the other? I am about to hazard a position, which, to the enthusiastic inexperience of youth, may appear a blasphemy, but from which reflection will soon disperse the scandal, and even justify those assertions, hazarded without proof in this philosophic age, by men, with whom, in other respects, I am no way solicitous to hold a community of principles.

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The versification of every language is but a habit.—It is the idea which constitutes poetry, it is rule which makes verses: the latter then is mechanical, wherein practice alone is necessary to ensure success. A child, who was early accustomed to express himself in hexameter or alexandrine verses, whether instructed in French or Latin, would find no more difficulty in fashioning his ordinary language to this measure, than we find in using that which we have learnt from our nurses.

I remember having formerly been acquainted with a company of intelligent young people, who had imposed this law on themselves when they met together; and though their meetings were but twice, and oftentimes but once a week, and consequently their habit of rhyming was but ill kept up; they had notwithstanding acquired such a facility in the practice, that they often made thirty or forty verses successively, and expressed whatever they had to say in this manner. Some of their lines, as may be supposed, were most execrable; but there escaped them often very astonishing ones.

If any thing surprises me in the extempore speakers of Italy, it is, that they are so rare. In a richer, more flexible, and less confined language than our own, I should conceive it pos-

fible, with some little labor and practice, to acquire an habitual measure like rhyme, so as to be able to command it at the precise moment without trouble or difficulty.

As to the poetry of composition, that which consists in grandeur of images and liveliness of description, it is quite another matter; this is what labor and habit never can give, and what genius alone can bestow: but does this talent, which forms what we call a poet when expressed in methodical sounds, modulated by rules and according to certain received principles, differ from that which manifests itself in the speech of an orator, by the same sounds differently modified; or that which in the head of a philosopher, or an historian, discovers itself in ideas rendered sensible through the means of the same words, arranged only with less art, and clothed in more simple ornaments? I think not.

The orator may hazard a greater number of images, he may display greater boldness than the two last, the poet may allow himself a still wider latitude, because the style of each is different: it is taste that points out to them severally, the degree of embellishment or force which should accompany their ideas, and the various forms under which they are to give birth to that enthusiasm, that development of ideas, which is termed genius, and

and which at bottom is absolutely the same in all.

Thus moderate men, desirous only of taking exercise, walk quietly along, without fatiguing themselves; he who has urgent business on his hands makes greater haste, regardless of discovering a stronger agitation in his deportment; a man impelled by violent passion, or actuated by powerful interest, runs with still less conduct, he rushes onward, and exhausts his whole strength in the pursuit: all three make a different use of their legs, though in all, it is by the same organ, and the like principle of motion.

Now, if as the fact proves, contrary to probability, and in some sort contrary to reason, the one apparently the more difficult, is the easier, in this kind of mental labor; if the sonorous scaffolding with which a poet is surrounded, and whereon he supports himself, is in reality but the result of habit, foreign from genius, and better adapted to conceal a want of talents, than to facilitate their birth; ought we to be embarrassed to explain how those superior geniuses amongst ourselves, who at an early period have attached themselves to this habit, were afterwards incapable of estranging themselves from it,

it, and seem to have sunk beneath their own level when desirous of descending from it.

Take two children of unequal constitutions, constrain the more robust from daring to take a step without assistance, compel him to uphold himself in every motion by a support from which he cannot escape; whilst the other, permitted to preserve his independence, shall make a free use of those resources with which nature has endowed him: the first, when he wishes to detach himself from his machinery, will never be able to acquire the easy unconstrained deportment of the second, who on the other hand, from caprice or amusement, will soon have adopted the secret shackles of the other. This is the reason why, and the manner in which, in our modern idioms the talent of writing a fine prose, has often been united with one for poetry, whilst examples of this union in celebrated poets are so rare.

Amongst the ancients, another reason may be assigned, for the division constantly maintained between these two departments of literature. Perhaps the mechanism of their verse, founded on a different principle in their language, on another conformity in their verse, was a more real and sensible obstacle to those excursions which had united them,

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In Greek and Latin every word has not only its harmonic power, as we may say, and the time of its musical duration determined by certain laws which cannot be infringed, but there are many words excluded from poetry by the nature and the arrangement of the syllables which compose them; others again take a sense in verse which they have not in prose. The reader accommodated himself to these flights, which oftentimes became even beauties; but the poet, in quitting one of these districts, with the resources and limits of which he was thoroughly acquainted, perhaps knew nothing of the other but its barrenness, without even suspecting its fertility, from being unaccustomed to it.

Our modern languages have neither this profusion, this latitude, or this privation; there are no words necessarily excluded from our poetry by the number and construction of the letters and syllables of which they are composed. The famous *Esse videatur* of Cicero, or its equivalent, would in Italy, England, Spain or France, be alike proper to a poet, and an orator; but in neither of these idioms would it be allowable to call, as Virgil has done, the noise a horse makes when running a quadrupedal sound; nor, like Homer, the smile of a woman bathed in tears a crying laugh. Neither Cicero nor Demosthenes,
when

when speaking the same language, would have ventured on such picturesque expressions, reserved alone amongst them, for that species of literature which has dared to adopt them.

In like manner the words *Virgo*, *Puella*, are applied by Virgil to married women. He says of Pasiphae, already a mother,

“ Ah virgo infelix quæ te dementia cepit ?”

Of Euridice, wife of Orpheus,

“ Immanem ante pedes moritura puella

“ Servantem ripas alta non vidit in herba.”

If he speaks of Dido, who suffers her hair to play in the wind, he says she had permitted her head of hair to be spread in the air :

“ Dederatque comas diffundere vento.”

The orators took other liberties, but these were prohibited them. It is not surprising then, that these kinds of composition, wherein such different modes of expression prevailed, and where freedoms and restraints were so very dissimilar, should never have been combined together.

This distinction exists not amongst us. We have no poetical language which differs from that in common use, nor words which take a different

different signification in verse to what they do in prose. The fine passages of Bossuet, Flechier and Fenelon, of our celebrated orators, are poetry to which nothing is wanting but rhyme; and, on the contrary, many passages, even in our good poets, are no otherwise distinguishable from prose than by the return of the same sound at the end of every couple of lines; and I think no other reason can be given than what I have just assigned, for the necessity under which Corneille, Boileau, and others amongst us, found themselves, of being subjected to this return in order to preserve their superiority.

However this be, no one has proved better than Mr. Voltaire, that these pretended barriers between the two parts of the same art are easily broken down: as I observed before, he has not only treated of the greater part of prose in general, but he has adventured in each particular species of it, in like manner as he has done in every sort of poetry. In the review of his numerous works, let us begin with his romances.

The romance in itself is a sort of shade between poetry and prose; it bears an affinity to the one, by the share of imagination contained in it, and to the other by its simplicity of style. As to plan, it differs little from the epic poem, except in the catastrophe; but in its digressions
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it approaches more nearly to history. A romance is an imaginary history, offered as fabulous; history itself is but too often a web of fables given for truths. In this, perhaps, consists the most essential difference between these two species of narrative. In order to distinguish them, we must be previously apprised to which they belong.

Put into the hands of one unacquainted with books, the *Anecdotes of the Court of Philip Augustus* and the *Memoire de l'Etoile*, he will give equal credit to both; he will suppose himself, from one of these books, made as well acquainted with the affairs of France in the reign of the father of Louis the Eighth, as he is with the age of Henry the Fourth by the other.

But if mankind were willing, it would be possible to establish between these two kinds of writing a much more material difference in their utility, and render them further distinguishable by their effects. In the first, the author being the creator of events, may dispose them in such a manner, as to deduce from them a wholesome lesson of morality; in the second, having to recite but too often the enormities committed or conceived by human perversion, and supported by the caprice of fortune, or credited by that malicious propensity which gives such a rapid course

course to calumny, he is unable to offer to his virtuous readers any thing but motives for discouragement and indignation. A good romance ought to be a representation of the punishments attending vice; the most authentic history is seldom other, than a display of its triumphs.

It would not then be difficult to prove, that the first is infinitely preferable to the other, at least in point of moral utility. Were it possible for authors and governments to concur together for the public good, the romance should in an especial manner be set apart, to counterbalance, by a description of the opposite virtues, that of those vices and enormities the scandal of which history is doomed to perpetuate. But in every age mankind have read more for amusement, than instruction. The first romance writers, like the first historians, had no other object in view than to please.

The most ancient productions of this nature with which we are acquainted, are to be found among the Greeks¹; and even these are suffi-

¹ I do not here make mention of the history of Job, regarded by a great number of critics as a romance: they hold forth a moral, as salutary and sublime as the story in itself is pathetic: but the place this work holds in holy writ will not permit us to class it among the monuments of simple literature.

ciently modern. Complicated and pathetic incidents little allied to probability, and still less to morality, constitute the merit of Theagenes and Cariclea, of Ismenes and Ismenias, both attributed to bishops, and of the small number of this kind of composition which have reached us, in the language of Homer and Plato.

Among the Romans we perceive none, except the licentious satire of Petronius, and the no less licentious and fantastical metamorphosis of Apuleius, are to be reckoned such. The first is generally considered an allegory, but ought rather to be looked on as the offspring of an intemperate raving. A low ground-work, infamous digressions, some sallies of wit, and a few happy verses, compose the merit of this work: if it possessed any allusions they are lost to us; but it evidently held up no model of any kind.

As to the Golden Ass, it is probable that without the fable of Psyche this amplification of a filthy tale in Lucan would have made as little noise as the original; and even with this supplement, can its preservation be deemed of any great advantage to the Latin language, while so many precious reliëts of it are lost?

The enlightened ages of antiquity having held this branch of literature in small estimation, it developed itself with splendor in the midst of barbarism.

barbarism. About the eleventh century, the taste for romances was again restored, but under a form wholly new. The marvellous of every kind was pushed to the extreme; heroism and magic acted extravagant parts in them; knights and enchanter became gods rather than men; it is hard to determine whether the prodigies ascribed to the latter, were more absurd than the achievements of the former.

This taste lasted a considerable time: there was even in this immense progeny of folly two distinct generations, that of Amadis, or the Round Table, and of Charlemagne with his twelve Peers. From these two stocks an inconceivable multitude of chimerical heroes have arisen, in whose histories notwithstanding we often meet with interest, pleasantry, and even traits of genius which would do credit to modern productions, the prevailing topics of all are greatness of soul, generosity, delicacy, and intrepidity, all carried, as I have remarked, to excess, together with extravagant marks of respect and submission to the fair sex.

It is singular enough that imagination should thus aim at exalting human nature, precisely at the period when it was more degraded than at any other time. Assuredly, whatever may be said, it was nothing less than the manners of the

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times

times which romance writers delineated in their works. It is true that the age believed in forcery, but it was impossible that it could give credit either to the magnanimity of the knights, or the virtue of their mistresses. The first could not but be regarded as tyrants, in whom meanness and rapacity abounded, still more than pride and magnificence. Rendered invulnerable from their armor, whether engaged in the cause of their country or in private quarrel, they were much more anxious to secure themselves, than to attack their adversaries; and accordingly never were battles less bloody than at that period.

In the same age when so many marvellous feats were invented to the honor of prowess, it was that chivalry was most unfortunate, the worst conducted, and most humiliated: it was after those extravagant crusades, in which the flower of the European nobility had, for two successive centuries, delivered themselves up to be slaughtered by the scum of the Asiatic populace; in which our heroes had found means to be constantly beaten by base Egyptians and effeminate Syrians, unaccustomed to oppose any other enemy.

The chastity of the women of those days kept pace with the valor of the heroes. In these pompous tales, female modesty is more frequently

compounded for than revered; every other record of the times prove that debauchery and licentiousness were at least as prevalent then, as in ages which are called more corrupt, but which are only more polite; they possessed at least no more than a veil, which corresponded with the decency of the latter in concealing its deformity. The romances of chivalry are then, without exception, chimeras of the brain, and in no respect portraits of the times.

This taste prevailed till the revival of letters, and was confined to France and Spain; the Italians, among whom it does not appear to have been till then adopted, now gave into it in their turn with a sort of fury, but they caused it to assume a more agreeable dress. They conceived the idea of clothing it in verse, and embellishing by new fictions those which the French and Spaniards had already multiplied in a coarse prose. Pulci, Bayardo, Ariosto, and Tasso, distinguished themselves in this new walk, and infinitely surpassed their models.

What appears again extraordinary, is that the Spaniards, with whose genius these illusions seemed most congenial, and among whom they had in fact abounded for several ages, became disgusted with them precisely at the time that they appear to have been adopted by the Italians. The ingenious

Cervantes used the same art to effect their overthrow, to which they were indebted for their rise: his *Don Quixote* possessed the double and very uncommon merit of being at the same time an excellent parody and an interesting work in itself, independent of the criticism it contained.

The *Amadis* and the *Giants* were now succeeded in the Spanish literature by shorter tales, brought nearer to ordinary life. The imagination displayed in these was less extravagant and wild; the ancient Moorish gallantry was blended with a more rational heroism. This was denominated a novel; and Cervantes, the destroyer of the ancient species, deserves to be placed at the head of the new.

France had no part in this reformation; the fury of theological disputes, and the political feuds which succeeded them, seemed to absorb the active power of mens minds. Rabelais is almost the only author of these times we can quote who gave a loose to his imagination: but what a style of writing, and what an imagination were his!

I admire the good fortune of those who understand him, and can find delight in his works, but I envy them not. All I think wonderful in this strange jumble of obscenity and erudition, folly and burlesque on every thing held sacred,

is

is its success. Whilst wretches were throughout all France committed to the flames for receiving the sacrament in both kinds, and with leavened bread, who acknowledged the Bible for their rule of faith; at the side of this very Bible was placed a work, which, like it, was called the *Book* by way of eminence, containing a collection of disgusting obscenities, in which the Old and New Testaments, the church, her ministers and sacraments, and more especially the eucharist, that grand object of religious controversy, was turned into derision with a freedom and grossness scarcely to be equalled in the satires of Luther and Calvin.

When at length these commotions had somewhat subsided, and the minds of men, appeased by the latter years of the reign of Henry the Fourth, had begun to benefit by an intercourse with the Italians, and still more with the Spaniards, so long their conquerors, a revolution took place, equally important to the literature of France, as that effected by the piastres of the new world was to the circumstances of mankind. The credit of this is ascribed to Cardinal Richlieu, who most assuredly in no way contributed to it: it was in embryo, and even ripening into birth, long before his time. Neither Malherbe, Durfe, Gombreville, or any of those whose talents

he afterwards seemed to have in pay, had been encouraged by him; almost all these being born with the age in which they lived, had already cultivated and exercised their genius before a minister appeared about the throne who seemed to hold either them or their works in estimation.

Besides, this minister in his conduct discovered himself rather the enemy of taste than its patron; he interested himself in the *Cid* but to oppose it, to discredit, to afflict and to distress the author; he repulsed Mainard with harshness. The institution of the French Academy is rather a proof of his despotism, than of an enlightened taste for letters. His only view in forming this select committee was to insure to himself panegyric, not to perfect literature. Corneille was not admitted till very late, after having experienced more than one refusal, in spite of his poetical renown. Boileau, La Fontaine, Racine, would probably have been excluded, had providence so long protracted his life and his power, or, like Corneille, they must have purchased their admission by their meanness *.

* After experiencing two refusals, he found himself opposed to a man called Balesdens, who would have gained his point had he not had more modesty than the company, See on this subject the 4th vol. of these Annals, page 408.

Whatever agent Louis the Thirteenth had made choice of at the time when he took the bishop of Lucon into his councils, all the genius which preceded the age of Louis the Fourteenth would have equally shone forth; taste and letters would have been no way impeded in their progression, which was not retarded by the indifference of cardinal Mazarine, or accelerated by the zeal of his predecessor.

However this be, the dawn of good taste which began to appear, secured Gombreville, Calprenede, and Scuderi, from that outrageous disregard to good sense which had given birth to Amadis and Esplandian. They bid adieu to fairies and witches; their heroes were less marvellous, their heroines more decent; they seemed nearer on a level with the reader, though the grandeur of the one, and the virtue of the other, were still far superior to human nature, and to the ordinary intercourse of life.

Perhaps it may be allowable to regret this age of romancery, if we may hazard the term. In my opinion, the authors of Cleopatra, Cassandra, Cyrus, and Clelia, have been very unjustly accused of transforming the principal characters of antiquity into people of ordinary rank. Nothing is more ill founded than this criticism. In these productions love is ennobled, and always pre-

sents itself under a respectable form, valor, magnanimity, delicacy, modesty, every virtue which can adorn the two sexes are here described, with a splendor which at once excites admiration and attachment.

La Carte de Tendre, l'Echo d'Horatius Cocles, les Enigmes de Brutus, de Lucrece, may have furnished matter for epigrams; the length of the works, and that of the metaphysical dissertations they contain, may tire; a certain affectation of displaying a genteel style, of shewing a familiarity with the language of the court, may displease; but where is the mental labor that is faultless? Lastly, many of these stains are confined to Clelia, the Echo, the Carte Tendre, and the Enigmas: we meet with nothing of this kind in Pharamond or Cleopatra; and even those three insipidities, so cruelly exposed by Boileau, do not offend in the passages where they are placed, such is the address with which they are employed, so skilfully is their weakness concealed from view, and such is the nobleness, grandeur, and heroism of the remaining part.

What citizens are the father and mother of Clelia, or Arons, or Amilcar? Were that epithet applicable to them because the ground of their adventures resemble the ordinary distresses of life? This is a further injustice. What is it then, we may ask, which furnishes the subject
for

for poems and tragedies, if it be not the effect of passions alike discoverable in the Rue de St. Denis, in the Strand, in the Calle del Sol, as at Versailles, St. James's, or St. Idelphonso?

This at least cannot be denied, that these romances, at the present day consigned to oblivion, or the perusal of some amateurs or plagiarists, who have had recourse to them for ideas which their own barrenness of invention could not supply them with, are prodigies of imagination, resource, fecundity, and art, and, perhaps, the finest models it is possible to lay before mankind to dispose them to virtue.

Let it be observed too, that those precepts of courage and magnanimity which the authors inculcated through their heroes, were practised by themselves. The men of genius of those days distinguished themselves no less by their courage, than their imagination. Calprenede, when told that the mitred monarch of France thought his verses base, retorted this insult by a sally which could never have escaped a man of doubtful valor.

The bravery of Cyrano was extended even to rashness; a most valuable anecdote is preserved of him. Two of his friends were engaged in a quarrel, surrounded by thirty men, who attacked them sword in hand; Cyrano perceives them
from

from a window, rushes on the aggressors, disperses them, and carries off his friends in triumph. No romance has supposed any adventure so incredible and so fortunate.

The memory of Scudery, amongst us devoted to ridicule, ought in every virtuous and enlightened mind to be consecrated to respect. He had dedicated to queen Christina his poem of Alaric, wherein he had inserted an eulogium on the count de la Gardie, then the favorite minister of that princess; this is the custom of poets in every age: but what follows is not the custom of any. The minister was disgraced; Christina required Scudery to retrench his praises in a new edition of the poem; she intimated to him a present of ten thousand livres Tournois of that day, which were worth more than twenty of the present. Scudery was not rich: he answered, "that no reward should induce him to destroy the altar at which he had sacrificed." Christina ought to have repaid this refusal better than a compliance; she kept her money; she was a philosopher, and Scudery was not. It should appear that such men ought to be pardoned in drawing their heroes thus haughty and generous.

When custom had introduced satiety in this new species, and a change of taste, the fruit of
incon-

inconstancy rather than of perfection, had brought it into disrepute, Mad. de la Fayette, or Segrais under her name, and afterwards Mad. de Ville-dieu, Mad. de Gomes, and a thousand others, displayed another species of composition, the merit of which was still due to the Spaniards: I mean that of historical novels. These were miniatures of those Colossuses of which I have been speaking.

They likewise took names known in history, to which they adapted fictions shorter, more pathetic, and more similar to those which occur daily, or of a different sort of singularity than the grand martial achievements and exemplary chastity of Oroondates, Candace, &c. but still these tales, which interested the heart without alarming modesty, were possessed of delicacy, imagination, and beauty.

This taste prevailed till that vile inundation of obscenity which has poisoned literature, the Sophas, Tanzai, Angola, &c. disgusting caricatures, wherein, to the disgrace of our age, its manners are but too faithfully delineated, and in which the romance, till then employed in elevating the mind, melting the heart, or at least in furnishing matter for amusement, serves only to vilify human nature, and to prove, as well as to perpetuate, its degeneracy.

Mr.

Mr. Voltaire, who in his *Pucelle* but too closely followed the fashion of the times, has guarded against it in his romances; he has opened to himself a way absolutely new. He has neither taken the mad sublimity of *Amadis*, nor the heroism, too exalted for our comprehension, of *Oroondates*, the pathetic simplicity of the *Princess of Cleves*, or the degrading burlesque of the *Mazulhim*, &c. He has chalked out to himself a path, in which an enlightened philosophy beams forth; a criticism almost always useful, and, with some few exceptions, a cheerful gaiety, in which every one may honorably partake.

In the romances of his best time, as in his tragedies, the outline of each is varied; *Zadig* is soft, agreeable, and creates a smile in the mind. Though several chapters are taken from *Ariosto*, or the *Chinese Tales* inserted at the end of *Du Halde's* collection, or from the *Arabian Nights Entertainment*; and though it contains no very splendid adventures, and that the interest is not lively, it is notwithstanding so well written, so replete with wit, with truth, and satisfactory representations, that it is read with a pleasure always new.

Candidus offers the most melancholy subject concealed under the most humorous garb, with that

that laughing philosophy peculiar to Mr. Voltaire, and which I repeat it should seem to have given him an excellent comic genius, he turns into complete ridicule the system of "whatever is, is right," maintained by so many philosophers, and causes a thousand bursts of laughter in his readers, in placing before them in every page, and with a masterly pencil, the evils inseparable from society.

There is more imagination in this second romance than in *Zadig*; the scene of the six kings dining together at Venice, is, in my opinion, an eminent production of genius, as well in itself as from the manner in which it is described, and the serious reflections it has a tendency to produce. Some few passages excepted, such as a certain *genealogy*, a grossness which but ill agrees with the beauty of the remaining part, *Candidus* seems to me the *chef d'œuvre* of sterling ridicule, of elegance, and, what is of more importance, of real philosophy, at least of such as can be introduced into a tale.

L'Ingenu again is in another style, and perhaps the most perfect of the three. It is to be regretted that some friend of the author did not persuade him to expunge some wretched puns, or indecent buffooneries which disgrace it. He presents to us pathetic pictures, all
taken

taken from common life and daily occurrences, without even excepting the Bastile.

It may be remarked, that it is the only one of Mr. Voltaire's prose writings, as *Tancred* is the sole tragedy, in which he has attempted to paint a scene really pathetic. The adventure of Mad. de St. Ives, her illness and her death, force tears from us. One would have been tempted to believe that Mr. Voltaire was desirous in this piece of entering the lists against the catastrophe of the new *Heloise* itself, imitated in the English *Clarissa*; but it is another style; it is even so different, that we cannot compare them: I have already remarked, Mr. Voltaire did not possess this species of excellence.

After these two romances, his *Scarmentado*, his *Micromegas*, and his *Memnon*, will be always read with pleasure. Too strong personalities and indecencies, too thinly veiled, detract from his *Candidus* and several others, the produce of his old age, that is to say, when years and his great habit of writing rendered him less difficult in his style, and his great certainty of being read made him less delicate in his expressions.

OF THE
HISTORICAL WORKS
OF
MR. VOLTAIRE.

THE HISTORY OF THE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

FROM 1763 TO 1789

BY

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**OF THE
HISTORICAL WORKS.**

**OF
MR. VOLTAIRE.**

AFTER thus traversing with so much success those departments of literature which depend on the imagination, Mr. Voltaire adventured into that of history, wherein this faculty of the mind is oftentimes more dangerous than useful. Is this attempt to be regarded in him as a temerity?—Although on this head there may be some uncertainty in the suffrages, it appears that the opinion of the disinterested is fixed and unanimous, in considering the historical productions of Mr. Voltaire, as one of the titles which best justify his fame.

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I speak

I speak not of the History of Charles the XIIth, a piece worthy of the reception it has met with; interesting, and finely written; but wherein the singularity of the events is more remarkable than the style. This work is written with wisdom, dignity, and elegance, but not in such a manner as to take from a rival the hope of equaling it.

What seems to leave no room for competition, what insures to Mr. Voltaire not only a distinguished, but superior rank to all historians, either modern or even of antiquity; what gives us authority to regard him as the creator of a new species in this department, still more than in that of the theatre or of romance, is his Age of Louis the XIVth.

This work, on its first appearance, excited universal admiration—even envy herself was struck dumb—she has since recovered her speech, but to charge the author with some trifling inaccuracies, many of which even, were the faults of workmen and copyists. But there is but one concurring voice on the beauty of its frontispiece, on the portrait of the political state of Europe which it exhibits at the commencement of this celebrated reign; a sort of portrait with which both ancients and moderns were alike unacquainted,
and

and which seemed even at its birth, to possess its full maturity of perfection.

The chapters on those ridiculous contests of the *fronde*, which would have entailed equal misery and contempt on the kingdom, had not forty succeeding years of splendor done away its infamy, were received with little less avidity; and in those too of which the arts, the government, of Louis the XIVth or his views, are the subject; his projects and measures are at once delineated with so much art and dignity, that the very errors of his administration seem to confirm the respect his real qualities are calculated to inspire.

His abridged Narrative of Ecclesiastical Quarrels was received with equal gratification: of those contests but too much multiplied in an age wherein the progress of letters ought to have made them less frequent. Mankind had never yet beheld an example of such clearness in the exposition of the causes whence these dissensions arose, a like impartiality in the relation of facts, such a grandeur pervading throughout a narrative: a dignity, accompanied with so adroit a trifling, as served but to develope truth, and almost to render reasoning superfluous. Did we possess such a monument of Grecian or Roman antiquity, it would be revered amongst us even to idolatry.

If the body of the history, that is to say, the summary of political events, has appeared somewhat inferior, it is perhaps because it is cast into a shade by those brilliant passages which precede and follow it; and further, because an abridgement, with whatever skill it be designed, has always something dry in itself; history, properly so called, is supported by digressions, in a still greater degree than by reflections.

Criticism has found in his Essay on Universal History, a greater fund of resource and support. It cannot be dissembled that this work is the fruit of that emulation which Mr. Voltaire felt to contend in every department of literature against those writers whose names are enrolled in the lists of immortality. The famous Treatise of Bossuet on Universal History was the object of his rivalry, perhaps of his jealousy: hence has resulted to literature a production of a nature wholly different. Mr. Voltaire, in aspiring to walk by the side of Bossuet, has absolutely run counter to the plan chalked out by that eloquent prelate.

Much less did he propose to himself the same end, or rather it should seem, that as he has been reproached, it was a direct contrary one he had in view. Bossuet wrote but to shew the relation which every grand event of ancient history had with

with the establishment of Christianity, and consequently to strengthen the respect due to that religion. Mr. Voltaire, it must be acknowledged, seems to have laboriously fought to lay before us in his Portrait of Modern History, all the greater and less events best calculated to do away that respect. Bossuet leads all to faith, and Mr. Voltaire all to infidelity.

I shall shortly give my opinion on that philosophy which transpires through almost all his works; but before we pass on to this subject, I cannot forbear saying a word on one of the most unjust criticisms this writer has experienced. Five years after his death a work appeared, the principal object of which was to abuse him, particularly on the subject of his historical productions; he is in every page of it quoted as an historian, and never without insult. If we are to credit Mr. l'Abbé de Mably, "He has
" finished all his works, before he well knew
" what he was about to say; he deals out silliness with emphasis: he cannot see as far as
" his nose; he is the most frivolous and entertaining of all historians; in his Charles the
" XIIth. he runs like a fool after a fool, his
" Universal History is but a pasquinade, &c. &c."

These strange expressions discover in the critic a very blind prejudice, and a most unjust ani-

mosity. Not only Mr. Voltaire is neither frivolous nor trifling in his historical compositions; but the reproach he most justly lies open to, is that of being too serious and too sentimental; that of exacting from his readers a too constant attention, and of presenting every moment deductions which, to minds not familiarized with habits of reflection, must render it fatiguing to follow him.

It is even a very striking singularity, that the man who is every where else so light and gay, should be capable of such gravity and unremitting labour. Far from being playful and frivolous, he discovers himself serious even to coldness, and austere to dryness. When he allows himself any malignant allusions, the humour is in the things, or the arrangement of the facts, and very rarely in the words themselves.

The Abbè de Mably ought to have been the last who should have hazarded this censure; he, who has attempted at humour, as far as he was able, in a work with the nature of which it was still less compatible; who in a collection of dogmatical precepts, says, "that Jansenism would again kindle a civil flame at the beards of the philosophers and their disciples, if, &c." which, to men of taste, will not appear a very refined stroke of humour; who somewhere else says,
that

that "an historian ought, in policy, to be somewhat more skilful than his hero;" which will appear rather an oddity than a jest.

He further reproaches Mr. Voltaire with some voluntary scepticisms, and is desirous that history should be in some sort an epic poem.

PART THE THIRD.
OF THE
PHILOSOPHY
OF
MR. VOLTAIRE,
AND HIS
WORKS ON RELIGION.

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P H I L O S O P H Y
OF
MR. V O L T A I R E,
AND HIS
W O R K S O N R E L I G I O N.

WE are at length arrived at that path, which, of all those that served to conduct this surprising man to fame, was the one in which he seemed most emulous of distinguishing himself; that, in which he delighted to walk during his whole life, and to which, if we may use the term, his excursions into every other were rendered subservient. Philosophy was his idol, his passion; and by this term he understood a hatred to what he called prejudices, a boldness in combating received opinions of every kind, but more especially on matters of religion.

His manner of treating these important subjects, has, as I have observed on the occasion of
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one of his Epic Poems, gained him the suffrages of the youthful part of his readers, still more moderate in their encomiums than their invectives; those of women, inconsiderate, and too easily seduced by what pleases them, to be capable of withstanding those *bon mots* which are substituted for arguments; those of the greater part of men of the world, seldom well informed, and still more rarely capable of reflection, and who always giving the fashion to, or receiving it from the women, were naturally led to unite with them in their esteem for a man, who could make them laugh while discussing the most serious subjects.

On the other hand, the devotees of both sexes, serious men, who regarded religion as the safeguard of manners and the public tranquility; the clergy, whose office it is to inculcate the duties of religion, and who naturally persuade themselves it is their duty to defend it: have conceived a reasonable horror against a man who openly declared himself its enemy. They proscribed him as a public corruptor, who was so much the more dangerous, as his poisons were, as they said, administered in the form of remedies—he pretended an ardent love of truth, only to gain the more credit for his errors, and further, because whilst multiplying blasphemies,

phemies, he covered them with an appearance so specious, with a levity so well adapted to seduce, that he ensured almost as many accomplices as readers.

Between these two decisions, so different, he who would wish to form an impartial opinion, must be compelled to incline towards the more severe. The admiration he cannot refuse to the talents of the writer, is diminished when he enquires what good has been done by the philosopher.

Not but that in the latter character Mr. Voltaire has been of very great benefit to mankind. Being of all men who have written the most universally read, who even to the highest point of perfection possessed the art of expressing his ideas with perspicuity, and of insinuating them with art, he has made an infinite number of profelytes, and he ought to have his due tribute of thanks, when his notions have been found to conduce to the public welfare and the general benefit of society. Of these he possesses many, on literature, education, government, legislation, and even on jurisprudence.

Though he did not immediately work a reformation, because he did not possess the requisite power, he kindled that general spirit, which in time produces it, and therein effected a real change.

change. Manners are become more polished, if not more pure, and the eyes of men are more open to what may do them harm. Decrees, which thirty years earlier would not have excited the least alarm, have been annulled by the voice of the people, which has compelled their governors to yield to the claims of reason and justice. Debates, partly political and partly religious, which at the commencement of the present century, and perhaps still later, would have led to violence and persecution, have excited no interest whatever. The general indifference has rendered them less acute, and their effects less tedious and mischievous; and perhaps, in the end, may in time wholly prevent them, and thus spare our children from a scourge which has afflicted and disgraced their ancestors.

Justice obliges us to acknowledge, that it is in a great measure to Mr. Voltaire we are indebted for these benefits. So far he is entitled to claim the gratitude of his contemporaries and of posterity. I will even go further—had he confined himself, in treating on religion, to shew how far, under pretence of enforcing its privileges, the spirit of its founder has been departed from—to what a degree, passion has sometimes prevailed over morality—if, in a masterly description

description of the crimes produced by fanaticism, the scandals of superstition, the meanness of avarice—veiled under a venerable form, addressing mankind he had said, “ These horrors
 “ are no less opposite to true religion than to
 “ reason;” an idea so well expressed in *Alzira*,

“ Our God is their's, my son, but they insult him.”

If even he had sometimes embellished these serious truths by the graces of his style, and made use of his powers of ridicule to expose the opposite errors; he had still merited the title of a benefactor to mankind.

Unfortunately, he has not confined himself within these limits. His design seems not to have been to prune the tree, but to tear it up by the roots. In his latter years especially, he seems to have imbibed an anti-religious fanaticism, more outrageous than that of which he accuses the priests, who were the object of that by which he himself was actuated. Assuredly no enthusiast of any sect, or of any reformation, has allowed himself in such violent and cruel invectives against infidelity, as he has multiplied out of number against christianity. His hatred of this religion was become an universal, a real mania, it took possession of all his
 4 faculties,

faculties, spreading disorder through them, and leading him often to offend equally against the laws of logic, as those of decency. I shall here quote but one instance, drawn from his drama, but from a piece wherein he was more occupied by philosophy than poetry.

It is the character of Joad in *Olympia*, and that of the priesthood in general, whom he strived to render odious: that factious, intriguing, and despotic spirit, which he attributes to the christian clergy, he wished to describe and vilify, in delineating the character of a pontiff exempt from all these vices. In order that we may not mistake his intentions, he has taken care to explain them himself in the remarks which follow the piece.

He there says in direct terms, " By what right
" does Joad the priest arm his Levites against
" a queen to whom he has taken an oath of alle-
" giance? By what right does he cause her to be
" murdered in her old age? Was it for Joad to
" conspire against, and kill her? He was her
" subject, and assuredly, consistent with our
" manners and laws, it was no more allowable
" in Joad to cause his queen to be assassinated,
" than it would have been in an archbishop of
" Canterbury to have put queen Elizabeth to
" death,

"death, because she had condemned Mary
"Stuart."

Certainly, the comparison is as unjust, as the reasoning is incorrect. How does Joad become the subject of Athalia? How is she his queen? She was an alien, an usurper; she enjoyed the throne, it is true, but she had paved her way thither by the slaughter of all whose birth gave them a title to it. How is Mr. Voltaire authorised in saying that Joad had sworn allegiance to her? If even from motives of policy he had consented to pay her that homage, would that alone have been sufficient to justify us in applying the terms of rebellion and assassination to a revolution directed by him who recalled the lawful heir to the crown, preserved through his means?

Let us suppose that Catharine of Medicis had caused Henry the Third to be murdered, and had possessed herself of the crown of France, as Athalia did that of Jerusalem; that Henry the Fourth at this epocha had been a child; that an archbishop of Paris had found means to convey him out of the hands of those who by murder and poison conspired his death; and that when this prince came of age, he had presented him to the people; that a revolt had in consequence taken place, wherein the usurper was
R destroyed:

destroyed: could this prelate have been accused of conspiring against, and assassinating his sovereign?

Examples of this sort of injustice, and these wanderings in Mr. Voltaire, are many in his philosophical works. He somewhere says,

“ I have done more in my time than Luther and Calvin.”

This is true in every sense, but more especially inasmuch as those celebrated reformers sought only to repair the building; they did not pull it down; they lopped off those exuberances by which, in their opinion, the purity of the Christian doctrines had been sullied: but they revered the foundation of the structure; and when even the ties which united them with the Catholics were torn asunder, they still retained the gospel as the guide of their faith and conduct. But in the reformation of Mr. Voltaire, what remains to encourage the weak, to console the wretched, to curb the wicked, and to serve as a sign of union to all men?

“ Deism, says Mr. Voltaire, the idea of a God, the dispenser of future rewards and punishments, has been the religion of great geniuses in every age: it was that of Julian, of Marcus Aurelius, Cicero, Scipio, and others. Why, possessing as much understanding as Cicero, should I hold
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the religion of my times in more respect than he did that of his? His philosophic works are complete courses of incredulity, and they are reprinted *ad usum Delphini*. Why should I be thought culpable for a conduct thus honorably rewarded in him?

“Your censure of my pretended boldness is but a continuation of your inconsistency. In attacking your belief I cannot do more harm, than he who declares aloud that he doubts of every thing; the toleration of every age towards his scepticism, sufficiently proves this virtue to be no way detrimental. Why not extend it then to me?”

This is nearly the summary of what Mr. Voltaire has urged in defence of his anti-christian effusions. I have long since expressed my sentiments on the subject—leaving the system to those whose province it is to inculcate, and to defend it; I never considered its doctrines but in a political point of view. It is not in the character of a missionary, but a philosopher, that I shall reply to Mr. Voltaire in the following terms:

Your idea of toleration is a fallacious one, and you rely on the example of Cicero for your support in it, with little reason; circumstances, which alter every thing, are materially different

in the eighteenth, from what they were in the first century of our æra.

1st. In that orator's time, not only the body of the people, but even the higher classes of the citizens, did not read at all. The excessive price of books, and the difficulty of procuring them even for money, rendered them an object of luxury, and consequently an appendage to opulence. Thus all the opinions debated in the schools, or in writings, reached those only who had leisure and time to spare in attending these philosophical discussions, or men of fortune, who amused themselves with them in their closets, which even at Rome scarcely composed, in that age, one millionth part of the nation.

2dly. Cicero treated these subjects philosophically; his style was adapted to the gravity of his matter. If he imitated Plato in the familiar turn of his dialogue, he kept him no less in view, in the severity with which he avoided whatever had a tendency to ridicule. He allowed himself no other embellishments than perspicuity and elegance: a further reason to confirm us in the opinion, that he sought for readers only in a very confined order of society.

3dly. Whatever impression the opinions of Cicero might make on this small body of readers, or even granting that their number was more

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considerable, no material evil could flow from it, since paganism, whose divinities he questioned, had no dogmas. It consisted in ceremonies and rites, indifferent enough in themselves, and in support of which it was no way to be apprehended that any one should become inflamed, since the policy of the state had ceased to consider them among the principal engines of government.

On the other hand, the very mythology whose chimeras he divested of reverence, neither offered such precepts of wisdom or examples of virtue, as to cause the philosophy which brought them into disrepute to be any way deemed dangerous. Assuredly such principles of refined morality, regulated by reason and a love of the public welfare, as are displayed in the Offices, &c. would bear to be put in competition as to the benefits likely to accrue to society from the effects of each, with the story of Mercury the god of thieves, or that of Vulcan's nets. The general order of society could sustain no injury by the contempt into which altars had fallen dedicated to a patron of robbers, or serving as examples of conjugal infidelity.

4thly. With regard to the indulgence in which his philosophical reasonings are held at the present day, as to the use made of them without

scruple and without alarm in our schools, and the little concern with which we behold them in the hands of every description of readers, the inconsistency you point out in such a conduct will not justify you. Custom, the difference of our idioms, the title of an ancient, the veneration he inspires, might all be urged in excuse for the negligence of tutors and governments; but, in fact, they are not justly liable to any reproach on this head. The truth of the divinities, and the religion of the times in which he lived, are the objects of the Roman orator's enquiry; the dreams of paganism; which he treats as puerile illusions. These deities, and this system, are now no more. It is not to be apprehended that the reflections of a heathen philosopher on the sacred fowls, or the adventures of Jupiter, will cause any doubts in the mind of a reader on the mysteries of the Christian religion. We may safely put them into the hands of a pupil, as models of purity in a language he is studying, without being any way apprehensive of their making impressions capable of changing his belief.

But can you avail yourself of any of these pleas? Are the times the same? Does our system, our religious principles or our doctrines resemble those fables which Cicero derided?

Will

Will the subject, the tendency, and the spirit of your works bear a comparison with those of Cicero in any of these respects? Your object in writing, especially on religion, was to be read by men of all ages and conditions. The numberless pleasantries with which your works on this subject abound, could have no other end. The very form of these pamphlets, always short, and consequently easily procured, convenient to be read or retained, and moreover within the reach of every inquisitive person, is an index which reveals your secret. It is then the multitude, the body of the people, you were desirous of seducing, or, if you please, of persuading: now what good end could you propose to yourself or to the world in doing this?

I gave you due praise for having held up the quarrels of the Jansenists to ridicule; for rendering odious the persecution of the Protestants of the last century: doubtless, a pertinacity in requiring of the Jansenists a retraction in itself immaterial, was altogether as extravagant as their obstinacy in refusing it; the expulsion of the Protestants, or at least the conditions on which alone they were allowed the right of breathing their native air, was cruel. You did right in exposing to the derision or abhorrence of the public, these two effects of folly and despotism; but is it the

same with your insulting sarcasms and endless jokes at the expence of whatever Christianity holds up as sacred to the people.

You are continually laying claim to the privilege of toleration, for which I am no less an advocate than yourself; but you make it to consist in rights which most assuredly could never belong to it. Toleration extends no farther than in leaving free from restraint the opinions and even the conduct of men, so far as they do not interfere with the public welfare; in leaving every one at liberty in matters that relate merely to himself to act agreeably to his own conscience and opinion; but not in permitting him to labor at altering, or in allowing to assume a controul over those of others,

Thus, whether you comply with the external forms of religion or not, as long as you confine yourself to a silent omission merely, I think that the police has not even a right to take cognizance of it. In refusing to yourself the advantage of these salutary observances, you endanger your own soul only; the magistrate and the pastor can do no more than exhort, and lament for you; whilst peaceably permitting you thus to estrange yourself from your religious duty, they fulfil theirs, they are tolerant,

But

But if you render these ordinances ridiculous to your neighbours; if you inspire them with contempt for the mysteries which are celebrated in them, you then become a teacher; you disturb good order; you are then intolerant yourself, since you endeavour to destroy the faith of those who passed over your incredulity. From that moment you are criminal, and, unless you are repressed, may do considerable harm.

Were you to go about to insult a monarch in his palace, to proclaim aloud that it is folly to solicit favors of him, or to hold his ministers in respect, to brave him in the presence of his courtiers—where is the captain of his guard, or the private sentry, where the meanest of his officers, who would not hasten to avenge him? What spectator, though more philosophic than Julian or Cicero, who would dare to blame them? And if, in the fervency of a real or political zeal, they were to use you ill, would you have any just title to complain of oppression and tyranny?

You wish to destroy the priesthood—you wish to have soldiers and magistrates only—but when the sovereign, hurried on by his passions, shall have violated the laws; when, like David, he shall have murdered the husband to make his wife a widow and to marry her—when, like Theodosius,

Theodosius, he shall have proscribed and delivered over a whole people to slaughter, met together to be entertained by your theatric talents—is it on the gentlemen of the long robe we are to rely to arrest his arm, and compel him to deplore his crime? or must we resort to heroes like Joab, to impose a penance on him, and compel him to commemorate his sorrow by public acts of contrition?

It was an ecclesiastic who was commissioned from God to say to the father of Solomon, *Thou hast sinned*. When the Thessalonic massacre was perpetrated, we may suppose that the Roman empire had within it numbers of virtuous lawyers and General officers possessed of generosity—these served, however, but as approvers and ministers to the dastardly cruelty of the prince; had it not been for the heroic courage of a priest, it had passed unpunished.

What punishment, say you, what reparation for the murder of seven thousand people, to be obliged to abstain for some months from going to mass? Doubtless the crime was great, and the chastisement trifling. But had St. Ambrose adopted a more rigorous one, you would have accused him of despotism and rebellion. It was of less importance to expiate the fault already committed, than to prevent the commission of a
new

new one: the prince was to be punished, not degraded; the object was to confine him, without enraging him, to insure the lives of his subjects, without irritating the minds of their governor. The conduct of St. Ambrose appears to me a master-piece of religious rigor, and political indulgence.

Let us be cautious of breaking down these barriers, the only security to miserable subjects against those monsters who descend to crouch around the throne, but to acquire a right to devour the people. It is certainly immaterial to the public tranquility, whether twenty or an hundred philosophers deliberate, concur, or perplex one another, provided their systems, either true or false, stop here: but it is not a matter of indifference that their freethinking should extend to the people, who stand in need of guides, or to their governors, for whom restraint is needful; which restraint can consist only in the commands of a God, superior even to monarchs themselves.—A God who speaks; and ministers who announce his will, appear then to be necessary. These will abuse their power—that may be—but would there not be still greater danger in unbounded licence? The only means of preventing this, is that of rendering the clergy virtuous, and that the interest of its members will prompt them

them to be. In an enlightened age, the efficacy of their remonstrances depends more especially on the respect they inspire as a body of men; a temporizing priest is, of all others, the basest and most despicable of mankind. Had not St. Ambrose been a prelate of irreproachable character, the courtiers would have derided his resistance, or he would not have dared to make any.

Since then, except in an age of barbarism, the power of the clergy can never be held in such respect as to become formidable, it will never become dangerous, because the veneration of the people towards their pastors will be granted them but in proportion as their conduct is conformable to the rules of that morality they teach; and religion in every nation enjoins them integrity, and no less strictly prohibits them from intriguing. Is it by degrading that religion, that they are to be inspired with the desire of doing it honor by their lives?

But what need, say you, of mysteries, what occasion for dogmas? Why this belief required to absurdities which are contrary to reason, and which we cannot even pretend to admit without blushing to have been capable of acknowledging them? &c.

I always

I always leave to divines, to teachers who are honored with this ministry, the care of justifying the revelation, of establishing its truths; but I ask you, in the name of that reason whose rights you think you are defending, what you find humiliating in its mysteries? They are incomprehensible, as has been already observed by writers more eloquent than myself: but does it necessarily follow that they are absurd? Is not every thing in nature mysterious to you; and is every thing therefore impossible or extravagant?

For instance, is not light a mystery? Can you assign any reason, why that ray of light which is invisible when it is not reflected, acquires, when thrown on any object, the faculty of striking your eye, and of irritating your nerves? Can you conceive how it is not itself which is sensible of it, but the surface whence it is reflected, and whereof it has received the impression?

This common miracle, this daily mystery, you notwithstanding give credit to; you avail yourself of it; you conceive it no degradation to enjoy the pleasure of a beautiful landscape or a grand view, although the mode in which the immensity of the objects which are made to pass over the optic nerves, is to you wholly incomprehensible:

prehensible—why then are you more captious on the mysteries of religion?

But faith does not depend on you! Be it so. Silence, however, is within your power—once again, what compels you to break it? A man born blind would not be required to believe in the prodigies of light; he is deficient in the organ necessary to enable him to form an idea of it. Did he content himself with a silent denial of the fact, others would rest satisfied with lamenting his infatuation; did he even declare aloud in his own chamber, that these are absurdities, and that it indicates imbecility to admit them; were he, in support of his system, to multiply pleasantries, and even witticisms, which he might do with little effort—indulgence would still accompany our pity.

But were he to cry aloud in the street, that it argues a man to be a fool to have windows in his house, and that the architects who construct them are knaves; if he threw stones at, and began to break them with his stick; if at the alarm thus given, other blind men, and even such as saw clearly, but were ill disposed, assembled together, and all announced the disposition together with the symptoms of a tumult, would it not be necessary to run? Would

Would it not be allowable to use severity towards such a demagogue and his proselytes?

Did the religious ceremonies of the present day carry with them, like those of old, that sanguinary and shocking appearance which filled the temples; were your organs lacerated by the howlings of victims, assailed by the stench of the fat of burnt flesh or of blood, your aversion might be excusable, although you could not justify it by the example of those great men to whom you refer as your predecessors and models in revolting against the religious systems of their times.

The philosophic Julian not only did not despise or fly from these sacrifices, but he assisted at and was personally engaged in them; he was himself the high priest, and himself afforded an example to those butchering pontiffs, of whom he was ambitious to be the head. Scipio, when summoned and accused before the Roman people, disdained making a defence, but disdained not to go to give thanks to the gods for those victories, which, in his opinion, seemed sufficient for his apology: he haughtily retired from the tribunal to which he was cited, but it was to prostrate himself at the foot of the altars, and to load them with victims. Socrates, when dying a martyr to deism, ordered a cock

cock to be sacrificed to Esculapius. His last words were an homage to the gods and to the religion of his country.

Thus, were you born under a system which physically required the blood of animals, in order to possess the privilege of excusing your internal incredulity by the example of these celebrated men, it would be likewise necessary to imitate them in their external conformity to established rites and ceremonies: but Christianity has purged its altars from this afflictive barbarity. It has substituted, in lieu of these massacres, a peaceful offering, which is neither offensive to the sight or the understanding; even physically considered it is an emblem of peace and union: regarding it in a political point of view, the sentiments it excites, are concord, a love of mankind, and gratitude towards the Almighty. Were this system distinguished by no other advantage, it would be sufficient to merit the regard of a benevolent philosopher; and the real power, the profundity of its principles, the impracticability of tearing them up without endangering the civil constitutions with which they are now incorporated, are so many decisive considerations which should, in a modern Confucius of really benevolent sentiments, extinguish the wish to destroy it, were it even possible.

And

And how many additional motives, even admitting this possibility, would concur in imposing silence on every true philosopher, on men more emulous of confirming the peace and union of society, than ambitious of the sad honor of establishing a reputation by breaking through those ties which extend to, and encircle its various classes?

I shall not examine whether this boasted Deism of the present day, be not in effect an Atheism, veiled under the slender qualification of the term: if this Divinity, without priests and ministers, sequestered in the ideal heaven wherein he is concealed, is a more efficient Being than the senseless and inactive Deity of Epicurus.

I shall not enquire whether this voluntary, spiritual, and secret communion, this internal worship tacitly offered up to a Deity without any sensible influence, and solely pointed out by reason, is as firm and efficacious a check to those desires and passions which are contrary to the general order of society, as that of a religion supported by the dignity of its ceremonies, the purity of its moral precepts, the majesty of its dogmas, and by the pomp even with which its ministers are surrounded. I am willing to suppose it.

I am even willing to admit, that its ascendancy will be the same over all men, upon
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every mind, and over all ranks of society: I will suppose, that the cool discussions of the philosopher founded on principles of reason, and demonstrating wide of the occasion, the advantage or disadvantage to arise, whether from resistance or compliance, will have equal influence on the mind with the power of the inspired Pontiff, holding out rewards and punishments from God himself, who continually repeating threats and promises, to be realized hereafter, exercises a jurisdiction, severe and formidable even at present, from its close affinity with a future state of retribution. All this I suppose: and doubtless it is doing no injustice to philosophy, to grant its power and effects to be equal to those of religion.—

Even in this case, between two different modes of maintaining good order which shall possess equal efficacy, is not the preference due to that already established? I am in possession of a building, which assures me a sufficient shelter to my wants; are you excusable in throwing it down, merely because you can substitute another which will possess the like advantages?

Deism is founded, say you, on good order, a love of virtue, and sentiments of brotherly love among mankind: which I grant. But has religion any other object? Its ministers have

passions and frailties!—but will your philosophers be exempt from them?

The formalities of religion are irksome; the duties it enjoins are fatiguing; it requires a submission grievous to be borne; its priests exact not only a belief in their doctrines, but respect to themselves. This is true—but regarding it with you, merely as a civil establishment, a political institution formed to consolidate the edifice of society, to ensure the general repose of all those who are assembled together to enjoy the benefits of mutual intercourse; is not this form, this duty, this submission, and this respect, indispensably necessary?

Would you deny a sovereign the right of having his guards, a magistrate his lictors, beaules, door-keepers? &c. Do you consider as an usurpation on their part, the submission which is shewn them, and the veneration they require? Why then such acrimony were it even more unjust and humiliating, at the deference shewn to a mitre or a stole, which you approve when addressed to a diadem or a blue, yellow, or red ribbon?

Nothing certainly can be less philosophic and more childish than this distinction; it would not even be deemed pardonable in the populace, among the ignorant and vulgar, who are guided

by appearances alone, and who finding something more striking in military evolutions, than in ecclesiastical ceremonies, consent with less reluctance to bend the knee to the haughty commander of the former, than the peaceful director of the latter. But is it possible that enlightened men, who boast themselves superior to prejudice, and who form their judgment of things by their intrinsic worth; can thus become dupes to their senses, and think it a degradation to prostrate themselves before one uniform, more than another?

You feel indignant at the deference you are constrained to shew to a rector or a bishop; but soon after you will find that irksome which is due to a sheriff, an alderman, a bailiff, a chancellor, or a king: all these gradations of obedience have an affinity with, and tend mutually to the support of each other. Your philosophy would be inconsistent, if after having broken one of these links, it were to be more scrupulously bound by the other.—Viewing them both as mere human institutions, once again, they must possess the same force or the same impotence: it is the most terrible disorder then in fact, which your opinions have a tendency to introduce—even without your wishing it—you are the

declared

declared enemy of society at large, whilst professing yourself that of its tyrants only.

And what would be the result, were I to trace in the lower ranks the baleful effects of this system of independence, which you assert in the name of humanity, and to maintain, as you say, the dignity of our species? I continue to question in your reformation none of those benefits which you attribute to it: I am willing to suppose that Deism, once admitted and universally believed, will conduce equally to the public good with any other system; that a philosopher, from his closet, will warm the minds of men equally by a good moral essay, as a preacher or rector by his public discourses or private and verbal exhortations; that a sinner, or a man who is tempted to become so, will be recalled to his duty as forcibly by the view of a Lyceum as of a Church; that academies of virtue, like those of language and physical investigation, will be established, and that these fine geniuses, whilst elegantly debating on morality, will operate as successfully towards its support, as a numerous and regular clergy now do, whose principal and even sole duty it is to fulfil this office.

But a certain time must necessarily elapse between the ancient servitude of mens minds and

their new independence. The only way of arriving at that sublime and purified point your philosophy aims at, must be by bringing these rites and habits of slavery into contempt. This interval may perhaps be safely passed over by some minds more refined, better organized, or secured from the dangers of temptation by a competent fortune, or a want of opportunity to do ill.

These will not consider their duty as done away, with those accessory aids which had formerly accompanied the theory. Be it so. But the great body of mankind, whom you think it essential to enlighten, and whom it is certainly of very great importance to restrain; that body of men who in every thing lie open to temptation, because throughout life they are on every side bounded by necessity; that people to whom every minute brings with it some want, and every step reminds them of some constraint; will the like reflections and an equal discretion attend them? When all men are become Philosophers and Deists, it will no longer be necessary for them to be Christians. I grant it: but in the time of their education, in the interval set apart to free them from their old prejudices, and inspire them with new lights, how will they act?

Will they be capable of separating the virtue they are to love and to practise, from that principle

ciple which instilled it? a principle which you teach them to fly from and detest. Will they be capable of confining to external forms merely, that contempt which you recommend towards the late objects of their adoration, and consider themselves still bound by duty, when they are no longer so, by those visible habits, intended to enforce its observance?

If you hesitate for a reply, every enlightened man, even among your own partizans, many of those whom you have amused and perverted, will they not make it for you? See what passes in that society wherein you enjoy a triumph apparently so flattering, where you have in reality formed a seminary, not of disciples, but preachers, as bold and as zealous as yourself—

Every thing is there appreciated, every thing discussed, and every thing subverted; but what is the consequence? Ask the magistrate invested with the severe duty of punishing crimes, and you will hear if he does not mourn to see the number of them increase, in proportion as the influence of that peaceful ministry is weakened, which was destined to their prevention.

As to those crimes which the law cannot strike at, because they are either too secret in their nature, or of a description for which there are no

punishments provided; with regard to those which introduce disorder into families, by destroying those principles on which their felicity depends; consult the general voice of mankind to know whether Deism or Religion is best calculated to repress them. Will you dare to assert, that it is in philosophic families we are to look for models of filial respect, conjugal love, sincerity in friendship, or fidelity among domestics? And were you disposed to do so, would not your own conscience, your own experience, suppress this falshood even before your lips could utter it?

And were these melancholy effects of a licentiousness, decorated indeed with too many great names, confined to the circle of those families wherein it discovers itself with most impunity, the real philosopher and friend to mankind might rest content with a silent sigh; but its influence extends to every rank of society, and to men of all understandings. The footman, who, while waiting at table, sees men entitled to the rank of gentlemen, assembled together to turn that prelate into ridicule who teaches him to be faithful, and inculcates that doctrine which alone assures him of the reward attending it; would be weak indeed, if he did not soon think it ridiculous to persist in his integrity.

If a happy frame of mind, or the fear of the gallows, prevent him from realizing in his conduct the consequence of this more than indiscreet conversation, he will be the echo and propagator of it: as a man in health who has touched one infected with the plague, may communicate the infection without being diseased himself.

This epidemic evil notwithstanding, spreads itself abroad; it reaches to the workman secluded in his garret, and to the peasant dying with hunger and despair in his cottage; they are alike taught to compare their wants and miseries with the value of those scruples which prolong them; they no longer go to hear the minister who holds out to them in his sermon the hope of being one day compensated; who at confession counteracts the progress of temptation in order to withdraw them from it. And what is the consequence of this terrible emancipation? Must it not either lead to crime or despair under every pressure of necessity? and does not the one almost necessarily produce the other?

It is here more especially that we perceive the prodigious difference between the arbitrary speculations of philosophy, and the real utility of religion; which uniting a sublime theory with customary duties, at the same time represses and consoles.

soles. The former indeed, recommends the practice of truth, moderation, obedience to the laws, and a regard to the property of others: this is the language of reason, or rather of interest; policy alone is sufficient to inform us, that, in order to exercise our own rights, we must respect those of others: but in all this, I perceive only securities raised in favor of opulence. What return does philosophy offer to the wretch for those fetters she lays upon him, when the possessions of the rich are at hand?

Does she enter his cottage through the filth that surrounds and infects it? Does she place herself beside that bed of sorrows, of the horrors of which, the devouring malady which consumes him is oftentimes the least? Does she offer in the compassionate visitor who exhorts him, the representative of a just God, about to indemnify him in another life for his sufferings in this? Does she enjoin on this eloquent dissertator the duty of seconding the future hope he holds out in his words, with an effectual present relief?

The philosopher who should sometimes fulfil this duty of benevolence, would be considered as a prodigy of virtue. Religion imposes it on its ministers as the commonest of all their duties, and a daily function which they cannot hold themselves excused from without being guilty of a crime,

nor

nor defer without betraying their holy office. They, in common with the philosopher, are protectors of the possessions of the rich; but, beyond him, they console the poor under the privation of them. The latter, in every sense degraded, reduced at every instant to envy the lot of the animals of whom it is his greatest happiness to be the companion, and oftentimes *the* slave; exercises even in his misery, a sort of empire over his pastor: he seems no otherwise related to society than through those remonstrances which justify the hardship by which he is sacrificed to its general good. It is only when exhorted, to see himself tamely deprived of every right of humanity, that he is allowed to suspect himself a man.

Were even religion justly chargeable with all those evils with which you falsely accuse it; were it true that in some unhappy times, and at certain confined intervals, she had introduced disorder into some periods in history; would not the services she unceasingly renders to every class of society, and which it is even her very essence to bestow, have long since more than expiated them?

Let us then cease to decry and to attack it—were it true that we might flatter ourselves with being able to effect its overthrow, it would be a
real

real crime to attempt it. If its interpreters and ministers sometimes lose sight of the object of their duty and vocation, the philosopher may take upon him to recal them to it; but not by proclaiming an insurrection against them, or by endeavours to render them odious and ridiculous: whatever are his private opinions, I think he should use his talents and his superiority of genius, to impress their several obligations and duties on every order of the state, and not to degrade, discourage, or destroy any one.

Addressing himself to the *clergy*, he ought to say, " Be virtuous and indulgent, that you may
" be revered and useful: to the *people*, respect
" the laws, which ensure your property; the
" civil power, which protects them; and the
" religious one, which defends the first from the
" invasions of the latter: and to *kings*, love and
" maintain religion; shew an example of the
" practice of it in your own conduct, because
" even to yourself it is a safer security than
" a thousand regiments; revere its ministers,
" whose ascendancy over the people depends in
" a degree on the countenance you shew them;
" restrain them if they wander, and they will
" never deviate from their duty if your favor is
" the fruit of a faithful performance of it; suffer
" not the principles of your faith to be discussed,
" they

" they are fixed; permit them, not to be defended
 " any more than attacked. Never persecute
 " those who having the misfortune not to believe
 " in them, at least are prudent enough to sup-
 " press their incredulity; but punish with severity
 " such as shall dare to display it with licentious-
 " ness; repress them, not so much to vindicate
 " the glory of God which these crimes cannot
 " affect, as to preserve the civil order of society,
 " which they have a tendency to disturb."

In holding such a language, a philosopher worthy of the name, would become the mediator between every establishment; he would be the universal benefactor of mankind.

It is to be regretted that Mr. Voltaire did not attend to this truth, or that too ardent an imagination prevented him from being sensible of its importance. A mind like his would have embellished, and given it additional force. Here it possesses but the plain and unadorned language of reason. I would ask pardon of his shade, at the foot of his tomb, for the freedom of this remark, if the justice I have done him in other respects, and a regard for the public good, did not authorise its severity.

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